

# Engagement of LGBT Teenagers in Sexting in Calapan City

**BERNARDO G. MAGBANUA**

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2883-1573>

[bernie37magbanua1972@gmail.com](mailto:bernie37magbanua1972@gmail.com)

Mindoro State College of Agriculture and Technology  
Calapan City Campus  
Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro, Philippines

**MA. ARLYN M. REDUBLO**

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7754-6667>

[redubloma.arlyn@yahoo.com](mailto:redubloma.arlyn@yahoo.com)

Mindoro State College of Agriculture and Technology  
Calapan City Campus  
Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro, Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

Mobile phones are essentially a part of people's lives, and it has changed the way people lead their lives. The number is rising and the number and the way cellphones are designed today makes access to other people and different services very quick and easy. The study aimed to understand and determine the different factors leading to the engagement to sexting. The data gathering was conducted in Calapan City with members of the LGBT Community as respondents. A qualitative study was used in the collection and analysis of data. Snowball sampling was used for the one hundred (100) identified members of the LGBT community, sixty-four (64) of them have signified as engaging in sexting and

twenty-three (23) agreed to be interviewed. The study found out that enjoyment and satisfaction is the factor that contributed a lot to engage in sexting. The results showed that loss of reputation greatly affected them as an individual being. Further, what started out as simple messaging continued to implicit messaging, then sending and receiving of nude or semi-nude photos, next video chat and for some eventually actual sex. It is recommended that the LGBT sexters should be knowledgeable about the consequences before engaging in sexting.

**Keywords** — Social Science, qualitative, sexting, consequences, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

It has been 40 years since the first mobile phone call was made. 2 decades after, the first SMS messaging was sent and another decade after camera phones were introduced. Mobile phones are essentially a part of people's lives, and it has changed the way people lead their lives. It has been estimated by 2019 the world mobile phone users might exceed the five billion mark. In the Philippines, as forecasted by the year 2018, there will be around 72.6 million people owning at least one mobile phone. The number is rising and the way cellphones are designed today makes access to other people and different services very quick and easy. Most users engage in watching videos and play games with their mobile phones while some would use it to find long lost family members, friends, and sometimes long-time partners.

The new generation of mobile phones is not just a communicating device. Teenagers can click pictures, text their friends, send multimedia messages, listen to music, surf the internet and play games. This is actually an endless list since now handsets are heavily loaded with so many features which cannot be counted on fingers (Peterson, 2009). This capacity of mobile phones is used and sometimes abused by some people. Just over 6,000 offenses involving teens under the age of 18 were listed by the police as either possessing, making or distributing indecent images of children in the year 2016 to 2017. (McManus and Almond, 2018)

Research defined sexting as the "Sending and receiving of sexually suggestive or explicit images, videos or text messages through cellular phones or other technologies." California State University and Indiana State University scientists polled 459 heterosexual college students regarding their sexting habits and if they are in a relationship, the way they feel regarding it.

In a study of 1044 undergraduate students between 18-63 years, 40% of the males (288 out of 719) while 50% of the females (163 out of 325) have sent

sexually explicit cell phone pictures. Of the senders, around 40% of the males, as well as the females, claimed that they were under 18 years when the picture was taken. Majority of those who had sent a text claimed that they had done it more than once and more than 50% have rated the experience as positive. While 30% are neutral, about 40% are likely to engage in sexting in the future.

There are many reasons for teenage sexting. Some of those are a curiosity for sex, peer pressure, love, less developed thinking abilities and money. Viewing sex on TV predicts and accelerates teen's sexual initiation and creates curiosity which leads to exploring and testing particularly with teens. Teens become curious of how and watch others look naked and are easily provoked by nudity; hence, exploration and experimentation initiate teen's sexting (Collins et al., 2004).

Engaging in such, sexting is applicable for adolescents of all sexual orientations; however, it may be even more important with sexual minority adolescents (LGBT), though they feel less comfortable disclosing their sexual identity and behavior, these individuals are more likely to be engaging in both sexting and sexual risk behavior. The researchers encourage providers to not only connect with LGBT youth about sexting, but also to stress the importance of protected sex, given their added vulnerability to STIs and HIV (Rice, Rhoades, Winetrobe, Sanchez, Montoya, Plant, and Kordic, 2012).

The purpose of selecting this topic is that, these days sexting has become a common issue in teenagers which has an impact on teenager's physical, social and psychological health. Nowadays, new communication technologies play a significant role in their lives (Valkenburg, 2011). The prompt contact to others via the internet and other electronic devices has intensely changed when, how, and what will teens learn from each other and the surrounding world. For instance, cyberbullying (annoyance through email, facebook, and text messages, etc) has become a contemporary approach (especially for teenagers) to be violent or threatening (Ahuja, Webster, Gibson, Brewer, Toledo & Russell, 2015).

## **FRAMEWORK**

This study is focused on identifying factors, which can be events, people, situations or phenomena that may contribute to a particular result or situation. There are studies that showed that curiosity, enjoyment, exploring physical attractiveness, and combating boredom as some of the reasons why youths engage in sexting and how the Theory of Planned Behavior does explain this. Taking also into consideration how the respondents see sexting benefits them and affects them.

Sexting is a relatively recent practice engaged in by people of different ages as well as those considered foolish. Although it does occur between and among people of any age, the real concerns are teenagers.

One in seven teens reports that they are sending sexts, and one in four are receiving sexts, according to a study of over 110,000 teens from around. With the increasing prevalence of sexting in recent years and continues to increase as the youth age, it is necessary that intervention, education and policy efforts be focused of researchers on nonconsensual sexting. The prevalence of sexting has increased in recent years and increases as youth age. Further research focusing on nonconsensual sexting is necessary to appropriately target and inform intervention, education, and policy efforts (Madigan, Ly, Rash, Van Ouytsel, & Temple, 2018).

Adolescence is a time of life in which teenagers are learning about their own bodies, how to take risks, and about romantic attractions. For some teenagers, engaging in sexting may feel like a way to explore their attraction to someone. It is recommended that rather than having one big talk about sexting, have several small talks over time to check in on your child's understanding, see if there are questions, and reinforce key messages (Moreno, 2018).

Teens who receive sexually suggestive images on their cell phones are more likely to say that they use the phone to entertain themselves when bored; 80% of sexting recipients say they use their phones to combat boredom, while 67% of teens who have not received suggestive images on their phone say the same. Teens who have received these images are also less likely to say that they turn off their phones when it is not otherwise required – 68% of receiving teens say they generally do not turn off their phones when they do not have to, and 46% of teens who have not received suggestive images by text report the same “always on” behavior (Lenhart, 2009).

Explication of the term “youth” necessarily precedes a discussion and study of youth sexting. Research on sexting and mobile phones uses several terms, such as “youth,” adolescents,” “teenagers,” and “young adults,” which refer to the young people as those between 15 and 24 years of age; for their own study, they sample high school students and refer to them as both “young people” and “teenagers”. Thurlow (2003) uses the terms “adolescents,” “teenagers,” and “young people” anonymously.

Seventh-grade adolescents participating in a sexual risk prevention trial for at-risk early adolescents completed a computer-based survey at baseline regarding sexting behavior, twenty-two percent of the sample reported having sexted in

the past 6 months. Sexual messages were endorsed by 17%, sexual messages and photos by 5%. Sexting of any kind was associated with higher rates of engaging in a variety of sexual behaviors, and sending photos was associated with higher rates of sexual activity than sending text messages only. Sexting behavior (both photo and text messages) was not uncommon among middle school youth and co-occurred with sexual behavior. (Houck, Barker, Rizzo, Hancock, Norton, & Brown 2014).

Researchers from Drexel University's Women's Health Psychology Lab in Philadelphia discovered that "sexting" or sending sexually suggestive messages through the phone is correlated with sexual relationship satisfaction, especially among those who with a committed partner (Vila, 2015; Miller, 2016).

Researchers discovered that people who were already in a relationship were the most likely to sext. People who were the most anxious about their relationship were also the most likely to send the most explicit texts, photos, or videos—including nudie and lingerie pics. People who worried their partner would judge them if they didn't sext were more likely to hit send on explicit messages, too (Miller, 2016).

For young adults engaged in a romantic relationship would send sexually-explicit picture or video messages would cite fun and flirtatious as their motivation to please their romantic partners. (Drouin, Coupe & Temple, 2017).

Educators and prosecutors across the globe say that "sexting" is a national phenomenon for teens. In fact, school administrators are grappling with sexting and another misuse of technology. Surprisingly, according to a study on Sexting and the Filipino youths, can proudly hold their head high and tell the whole world that sexting has no place in their lives. The young Filipino individual is updated with the current issue of sexting as shown by this data where more than 50% are aware of such phenomenon. Filipino teenagers' views of sexting are similar to the universal view of sexting as a phenomenon, although their belief is that there nothing good with texting (Alimen, City, & Alimen 2011).

Regarding information and communication technologies, for many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth, these technologies are their only or primary means of communicating with others like themselves, while offering a virtual window on the world free from many of the restraints imposed upon them within their communities (Blumenfeld, & Cooper 2010).

According to a study, those who have sent pictures to recent partners experience regret and worry. While others, at the time they sent the pictures report discomfort and trauma. Women and others who send sexual images to casual sex partners report fewer relationship benefits whether emotional or sexual

and those who send them to committed partners experience more relationship detriments associated with the sexting. (Drouin, et.Al., 2017).

In another study, it is possible that way of introducing sex into the relationship is through sexting or may act as an initial sexual approach. It could also be that sexual advances from an intimate partner or other peers may be attributed through sending sexually explicit image. Conversely, individuals are more open to expressing themselves sexually or that the level of flirtation escalates to include nudity, once an individual has sex. Therefore, with the association, it is found the sexting may probably be a reliable indicator of sexual behaviors. Further, girls have a higher prevalence of risky sex behaviors, including multiple partners and drug use or alcohol intake before sex who engaged in sexting behaviors. Thus, among girls, higher engagement in risky sex behaviors coincide with sexting behaviors (Donald S. Strassberg, D.S., McKinnon, R.K., Sustaíta, M.A., & Rullo, J., 2013)

Therefore, this study sought to answer what factors may lead an LGBT youth to engage in sexting.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study focused mainly on why LGBT Teenagers engage in sexting. Specifically, the study answered the following research questions: (1) how the youths was led into sexting? (2) What are the benefits gained from sexting? and (3) what are the negative impacts of doing sexting?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This qualitative study used thematic analysis, it is a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data. In thematic analysis, the data obtained from the College Students specifically members of the LGBT Community in Calapan City that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning; coding and classifying data, usually textual, according to themes; and interpreting (Lapadat, 2010). It was used to identify the factors leading to sexting and its advantages and disadvantages. The age of the participants ranged from 15 up to 24 years old. Out of the 23 who agreed to be interviewed one (2) or 9% considers herself lesbian, ten (10) Or 40% are gays and eleven (11) or 51% consider themselves to be bisexuals.

## Research Site

Calapan City was simply a little village before the institution of the primary spiritual District in Bago. The District convent was transferred to Calapan in 1733 and commenced its jurisdiction over the Northern island ecclesiastic space. In the early eighteenth century, the city solely occupied a strip of land stretching from Ibaba to Ilaya facing the church and cut-off by the river and later on, succeeding barrios were established.

From Puerto Galera, the capital was moved to Calapan in 1836. Then, when the province became part of Marinduque, Puerto Galera became the capital once again, but eventually Calapan became the provincial Capital when the province was detached to Marinduque in 1903.

At present, Calapan has an area of only 250.06 square kilometres (96.55 sq mi) consist mainly of rural areas, with jurisdiction over the three Baco Islets on the Calapan Bay and the two Silonay Islets. The population is estimated at 142, 214 from a population growth rate +1.52%/year based on 2010-2015 population growth rate.

## Participants

There were one hundred (100) identified members of the LGBT community, sixty (64) of them have signified as engaging in sexting and twenty-three (23) agreed to be interviewed. Of those who were interviewed, 9% were lesbians, 13% were gays and 78% are male bisexuals. Their age ranges from 18 to 23 years old with a mean age of 19. All participants are currently enrolled at the different Colleges in Calapan City at the time of interview.

## Instrumentation

This study used snowball sampling in data gathering. Snowball sampling, known as chain referral and is a non-probability technique that was used by the researchers to identify potential subjects in studies since the issue of sexting especially for the Filipinos is a question of moral act. The researchers then observed the nominated subjects and continued in the same way until obtaining sufficient number of subjects.

The researchers used a Likert scale survey questionnaire regarding the consequences behind the engagement of LGBT teenagers in sexting. The questionnaire consists of fifteen (15) questions administered by the researchers. The questionnaire contains questions of socio-demographic profile which included the age and gender identity as well as identifying the awareness and

engagement of the respondents to sexting. The questionnaire was validated by the subject matter experts, Mr. Bernardo G. Magbanua, Consuelo M. Untalan, and Ms. Maria Cecilia C. Maggay.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

In order to have access to the chosen college, the researchers gave a request letter and asked permission to conduct the survey in the school.

After the approval of the request letter, the researchers used the snowball sampling to search the participants. First, the researchers administered preliminary survey in which the questions were answerable by yes or no. The researchers chose the qualified participants for the study by reviewing and analyzing the answers on the leading questions needed to conduct the survey questionnaires for the factors to leading in the engagement in sexting. For the qualified participants, the researchers asked to fill out the consent form regarding their participation in their study. The researchers informed them about the study's objectives, scopes and limits of involvement, anonymity and confidentiality after which the researchers administered survey questionnaire. After the completion of the test, the researchers collected and analyzed the data from the gathered answers.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Curiosity clearly leads**

Based on the conversation fifty percent (50) of the respondents expressed that it was because of curiosity that they started with sexting. It started as simple messages that continued to sexting because they want to know how it feels to sext. This is in agreement with (Rasmussen, 2018) Young people intend to educate themselves and their peers about sexuality, including sexting, because the schools and parents can be poor at sexuality education Young individuals tend to look for answers themselves and see whether how they would feel if they do sexting. As like some of the respondents have expressed when asked how they started with sexting:

Respondent # 1

“May karelasyon ako na nasa malayong lugar kaya madalas kaming nagpapadala ng mga text messages. Dahil matagal na rin kaming magkakilala at may tiwala ako sa kanya, sinubukan ko ang magpadala ng message na may kaunting pasakalye ‘*antagal na natin, di ka man*”



*lang nakakaramdam?’* Mula nun, halos madalas na ganun na (sexting), masaya pala, lalo na pag wala akong magawa .... “

“I am in a long distance relationship, trust since we are far apart from each other we usually send text messages. Since we have known each other for a long time and I have trusted him, I tried sending him suggestive messages like ‘we have been together for a long time, and yet nothing has happened?’ From there on, we would do it (sexting), it is fun, especially if I have nothing to do...”

There are others that have heard it from peers that made him start asking questions about it and eventually tried entering to sites that caters to this:

Respondent # 3

“... narinig ko sa mga katabi ko na may-pinaguusapan sila tungkol sa nagpapadala sa kanila ng nude photos ng mga kaibigan nila. Nagtanong ako kung paano ang dapat kong gawin. Binigyan nila ako ng pwede kong buksan at nakita kong may nagchat na sa akin ng ilang araw. Hiningi niya cellphone number ko, kabado nga ako sa una pero nung tumatagal masaya pala, hindi ako nagpapadala kasi natatakot ako, nakakareceive lang ako. Ganun pala pakiramdam nun, nakakatakot pero habang tumatagal enjoy na din naman. “

“... I overheard my seatmates talking about someone sending nude photos to them. So I asked them what to do? They gave me a site that I could visit and after a few days I received a chat from someone. He asked me for my cellphone number, it was nervous at first but eventually after sometime it was fun. Because of fear, I don’t send photos, I only receive. At first, I am afraid but eventually it was fun, that’s how I felt about sexting.

### **Enjoyment and pleasure make it lasts**

As the interview continued there are about forty-eight percent (48%) of the respondents started with curiosity but later on started to enjoy and finds sexting pleasurable. Young people when given the opportunity to share their experiences about sexting, frequently claims pleasure and amusement as an outcome. Given an open-ended questionnaire, majority of North American 15 to 18 years old

indicated that sexting was nothing far from the ordinary and far from having a negative experience. Further, sense of enjoyment was gained from sexting and pictures that were shared were mostly due to romantic relationships (Anastassiou, 2017).

When asked how long have they been doing sexting and why do they continue to do so:

Respondent # 4

“Nagsimula po ako nung grade 11 ako so may mga two years na akong nagesexting . . . kalapit barangay lang po ung mga kasext ko . . . nagsimula po kami ng simpleng messaging pero umabot na po sa mga kuwentuhan tungkol sa mga ginagawa nila sa kanilang gf nakakaenjoy po lalo na kung walang magawa...mga ilang panahon pa ay umabot na rin kami sa physical sex po.”

“I started sexting when I was in Grade 11, so I have been doing this for two years now... he just live in a nearby barangay . . . we started with simple messages until it reach to a point that he was telling stories about how he is doing it (sex) with his girlfriend and I seem to enjoy it especially when I am doing nothing . . . until such time that we came to a point that we engage in physical sex.”

The report on sexting states that sexting is seen to be a safer way of developing as well as maintaining romantic relationships by young people. This is because sexting platforms are perceived to be safe and avoids the risks associated with having real sex. This is how media reflects adult sexting as a way to communicate sexual desire in a healthier way but fails to recognize that the benefits for young people might be the same (Anastassiou, 2017).

Respondent

“Yung boyfriend ko po ay taga ibang bansa, at dahil nga malayo hindi naming magawa ang actual sex, para na lang mapagbigyan ang hilig, through pictures na lang o kaya video chat. Takot din po ako magkasakit (STDs), kaya kung may pagkakataon nga na may kasex ako di ako pumapayag ng walang gamit. Yung taga ibang bansa naman, okay na rin sa akin yung video chat at parehas naman nakakaraos at pakiramdam ko mas okay yun kasi mas safe yun. Nakakasawa nga rin lang naman.”

“My boyfriend is from another country, and since we are far from each other, sex is a problem, so to give in to the desire we would send photos or engage in video chat. I have fear of getting infected (STDs), so if given a chance to have sex with someone I don't allow it without the use of any protection. With the one abroad, I felt it's enough to have video chat because we do reach our peaks and I feel it's okay because it is much safer. Although, sometimes you don't like to do it anymore.”

### **Sexing with benefits?**

Aside from the pleasure and enjoyment that the youths gain from sexting as well as the validation of their relationship, there can be financial benefits as expressed by the respondents as experienced. Pleasure may be superficial but the benefit is real. When asked why he continues to engage in sexting:

“Nakilala ko po ung mga kamessage ko sa internet isang Italian at isang British. May mga edad na sila pareho... hindi po ako nagpapadala ng pictures pero sila po ang nagpapadala... minsan po ay niyaya nila ako na maghubad pero ang kaya ko lang po ay yung sa itaas at di ko po pinapakita ang mukha ko... takot po ako baka kumalat. Minsan po ay pinagbigyan ko sila at naghubad po ako at habang sa kabila ay ginagawa nila yung gusto nila. Hiningi niya po kung saan niya ako pwedeng padalhan ng pera, bagamat nagulat ako natuwa naman ako. Akala ko nga biro lang pero totoo pala sapat na pong allowance ko yung pinadala. Simula po nun ay pumayag na ako sa gusto nila dahil kahit papaano nakakatulong sa aking pag-aaral. Medyo puyat nga lang minsan at may panahong hindi ko maasikaso ang mga assignments ko. Kaya siguro banda banda run titigil na rin ako.”

“I met these guys in the internet, an Italian and a British. Both of them are of age . . . I don't send them pictures but I receive pictures from them . . . one time I was asked to take off my clothes, but I can only show them my upper body and not showing my face . . . I am afraid that it might spread in the internet. One time I gave in to their request that I take off my clothes while they are doing what they want to do. He asked me where he could send me money, I was surprised but I got excited. I thought he was joking but he really did send me money enough as an allowance for my studies. So I continued doing what they like because

it helps to sustain my studies. I sometimes didn't have enough sleep and also I couldn't do my assignments anymore. So maybe in time I will have to stop doing it."

From the said conversation aside from the enjoyment and pleasure, the respondent continued sexting because of the financial gain that goes with it. As a young individual and who wish to finish school it's like hitting two birds with one stone. Physical pleasure paired with financial benefits from sexting.

### **Sexting has stopped**

Twenty-five percent (25%) of the respondents have declared that they have stopped sexting because for one they feel that they will lose the respect of others as well as condemnation from those who will know, because in the Philippines especially in the provinces it is a moral issue. One of the respondents even have the personal experience of a video of him spread to close friends and he felt so embarrassed and thought of not doing it again unless the other person can really be trusted. Another, reason for those who stopped is that the only thing they benefit from it is the thought of having safe sex and to enjoy idle time but the real pleasure is in actual sex which is different from it. Lastly, one of the respondents find it more as a distraction especially in his experience during examination week where he was not able to study well in order to give time to the sex mates.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The results showed that one of the reasons why they are engaging on sexting is that they feel enjoyment and satisfaction on their life every time they are doing it. It satisfies their sexual desires as well as look that sexting is much safer than having physical contact. They continue to engage on sexting as long as they feel the enjoyment, fulfil their sexual desire without the fear of the possibilities of having contacted STDs or HIVs, and the experience being able to receive financial support for doing sexting. There are also those who stopped sexting because the real pleasure is found in actual sex but a protected one and others find it helpful during boring moments when there is nothing to do. There seems to be no tangible benefits but there is real fear of condemnation and humiliation from those who will learn that the person is engaged in sexting and that especially in the province it is a moral issue.

## **TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH**

Since most of those who engage in sexting are the youths, this study may help teachers create an age-appropriate and culture-sensitive sex education curriculum that will develop responsible Filipino youth who are aware of risks and issues involving reproductive health. This may be in a form of instructional materials like, comics which can be interesting to the young or short films that showcase young talents with emphasis on the risks involved in sexting. Brochures may also be provided for parents to become aware of but not intrusive with how their children are using the cellphones and therefore provide guidance on being responsible. The school may present a comprehensive sexuality education program to students to curtail rising incidences of early pregnancy, sexual violence and human immunodeficiency virus. The community may provide posters that may educate the young people as well as the other members of the values of self-knowledge, self-respect, self-protection, non-prejudice, respect for others, a positive attitude toward sexuality, responsibility and independence

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The LGBT sexters, teenagers should distinguish the factors leading to the engagement on sexting. They should have a deeper understanding about the indicators such as curiosity, enjoyment and satisfaction, and peer influence. They also should be knowledgeable about the consequences behind engaging in this activity because it may give negative effect to teenagers. Learn to avoid temptation from engaging on sexting. Teenagers could be exposed more in playing logical and educational games instead of using gadgets in sexting. The future researchers may study other possible factors in engaging in sexting as well as consequences that were not mentioned in this study. The students should think wisely before engaging on sexting. They should not subscribe to the factors that lead to the engagement on this kind of activity. Students should enlighten their minds that engagement on sexting results to different consequences. Next, to parents, to be open-minded with this and face the fact that their adolescents might be engaged in this. They must be educated to handle this kind of situation and be more of a guiding force towards understanding what sexting is and be caring. Lastly, the guidance counselor should help the students who experience the consequences of sexting to thoroughly understand their situation and they could coordinate with the Gender and Development office in conducting activities towards understanding sexting.

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