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## Sexual behaviors associated with meeting sexual partners online in adolescence

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Decoding how technology influences and can improve public health



## Disclosure

The authors have no conflicts to declare.

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## Study Motivation

- Given the ubiquity of youth Internet use, it seems likely that the Internet is a tool used by young people to explore their sexuality.
- Previous research has noted that the Internet is used by some teens to explore their sexuality (Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, Tynes, 2004). More recently, "sexting" has been of interest (Rice, Rhoades, Winetrobe, et al., 2012; Temple, Paul, van den Berg, et al., 2012).
- What is noticeably absent from this discussion is whether and how young people are using the Internet to find sexual partners. Examining this by sexual orientation identity is important because of differential risk for HIV and other STIs.

## Teen Health and Technology survey methodology

- Fielded August 4, 2010 - January 17, 2011
- IRB approval from CIRBI, UNH IRB, and GLSEN IRB
- Parental permission waived
- Eligibility criteria:
  - 13-18 years of age
  - Living in the United States
  - Informed assent
- Participants identified through Harris Poll Online (n=3,989) and GLSEN outreach efforts (emails, FB ads; n=1,918)
- The survey was self-completed online
- The median survey length was 23 minutes for HPOL respondents and 34 minutes for GLSEN respondents.

## Research questions

1. How many adolescents 13-18 years of age have met someone online that they subsequently had sex with offline?
2. Is meeting an online sexual partner associated with risky sexual behavior (condom use, concurrent sexual partners) or other indicators of concern (partner ever having an STI)?

## Measures: Sexual behavior

- “Have you ever had oral sex (we mean stimulating the vagina or penis with the mouth or tongue) when you wanted to?”
- “Have you ever had sex with another person that involved a finger or sex toy going into the vagina or anus when you wanted to?”
- “Have you ever, when you wanted to, had sex where a penis went into a vagina?”
- “Have you ever, when you wanted to, had sex where someone’s penis went into your anus?” and “Have you ever, when you wanted to, had sex where your penis went into someone’s anus?”

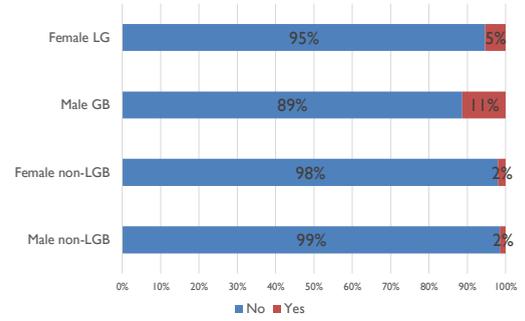
## Measures: Sexual orientation

- “Below is a list of terms that people often use to describe their sexuality or sexual orientation. How would you describe your sexuality or sexual orientation? Please select all that apply.”
- Response options included: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Straight/heterosexual, Questioning, Queer, Other, or Not Sure.
- Youth who endorsed “straight/heterosexual” exclusively, were compared to youth who endorsed any other sexual orientation identity

### Teen Health and Technology survey sample characteristics (n=5,680)

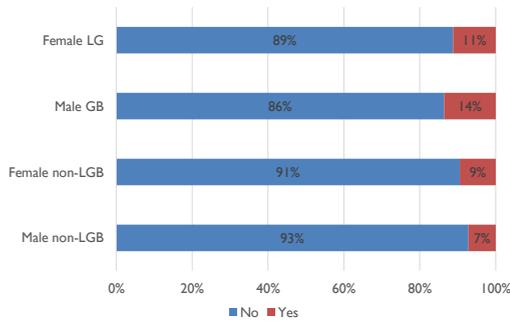
	Male non-LGB (n=1506)	Female non-LGB (n=1887)	Male GB (n=889)	Female LG (n=1398)
Age (M: SE)	15.4 (0.5)	15.7 (0.04)	16.1 (0.1)	15.8 (0.08)
White race	73%	66%	62%	65%
Hispanic ethnicity	17%	19%	29%	17%
Lower than average income	27%	27%	32%	32%
Small town / rural setting	40%	44%	29%	36%

### Meeting a partner online (among all youth)



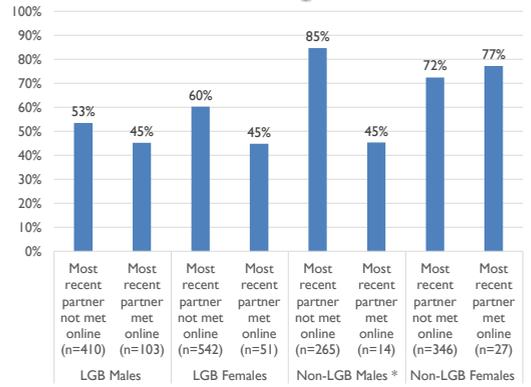
Design-based  $F(2.64, 14592.17) = 25.9418$   $P = 0.0000$

### Meeting a partner online (among youth who have had sex)

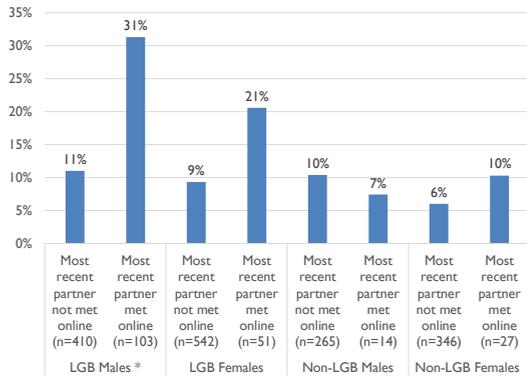


Design-based  $F(2.65, 4642.94) = 6.8262$   $P = 0.0003$

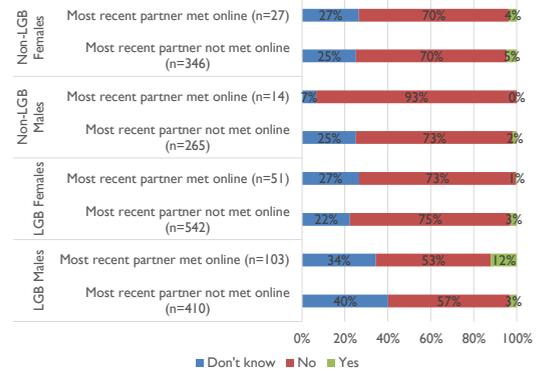
### Condom use at last vaginal / anal sex



## Concurrent sexual partners



## Partner has had an STI (ever)



## Limitations

- As with all self-report measures, some youth respondents may not have accurately disclosed sensitive topics.
- The representativeness of the sample is based upon the weighting. Findings should be replicated.
- Measures of sexual risk refer to the most recent partner, whereas indication of meeting a partner online includes the two most recent partners. Indicators are therefore proxies of sexual behavior rather than one-to-one measures of risk for online versus offline partners.

## Conclusions

- Although meeting partners online is somewhat more common for LGB youth, it is still reported by 11% or fewer youth.
  - Sexual health education should integrate online scenarios but not necessarily over-emphasize this as a way to meet partners, even for LGB youth.
- Findings do not support a hypothesis of risky sex associated with meeting partners online.
  - The rates of risky sexual behaviors are concerning across all sexual orientation identities. More needs to be done to invigorate preventive behavior.

Thank you

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<http://eurout.org/2010/03/24/studying-lesbians-being-ignored-and-excluded-not-targeted-research>