



Good news on the sexting front

Tuesday, December 20, 2011

We were relieved last week to learn from researchers at the University of New Hampshire that sexting among teenagers — that is, the sending of dirty pictures over cellphones or other communication devices — is not as widespread as many people believe it is. The findings are that only 2.5 percent of Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 send or receive sexually explicit images or videos.

In the recent past, alarms have been raised about sexting by young people, not only for the simple indecency of the thing but for the reportedly large numbers of teens who engage in it. The idea of transmitting indecent images of oneself or others is appalling, but the media apparently have gotten it wrong on the prevalence; the impression that a great many teens send around obscene material is apparently based on surveys that covered only older teens and people in their early 20s.

Having said that, the results of the new survey are remarkable considering the examples that adults have been setting for youngsters. In the past year, two New York congressmen were forced out of office after it came to light that they sexted women. Beyond that, the news this year has been rife with stories of men behaving badly, even illegally, in sexual ways.

Meanwhile, adults who run movie studios increasingly populate their films with sex, TV moguls fill their shows with innuendo and more, and spammers continue to fill Internet in-boxes with unsolicited promotions of sex products and services.

The message from all this is that some adults set awful standards for kids to follow, and not all kids are following. That the vast majority of young teens don't send filthy photos to one another with their phones confirms that they are more sensible than many adults assume. They may do stupid things — for example, they may say things on social media sites that might stick with them forever — but they don't send indecent images through the air with the abandon that we have been given to believe.

— The Keene Sentinel