

NAKED IN CYBERSPACE

'sexting' a new tech trend

Going about her everyday chores, Amber Smith has found a way to turn what used to be mundane into racy and provocative through the help of her cell phone. Whether she is doing the dishes or cramming for a test, Smith keeps the passion alive with her boyfriend by sending him creative photos and text messages while he is at work.

According to the 25-year-old Fort Collins local, Smith and her boyfriend share fantasies, photos and detailed plans, something she sees as a fun way of keeping his attention.

"It keeps the excitement going and it is fun," Smith said. "He gets really into [what I'm sending] and I might just be doing dishes or folding laundry."

Although many may not be willing to admit it, couples, friends and strangers share sexual photos and messages more often than students may think. What Smith sees as a way to keep a spark in her relationship is most commonly referred to as "sexting" – the act of sending picture and text messages of a sexual nature to someone.

Based on a survey on sexting conducted by the Associated Press in conjunction with MTV released in December, Smith and her boyfriend are far from alone. Out of the 1,247 young adults between the ages of 14 to 24, 30 percent admitted to sending or receiving nude or semi-nude sexting photos, and 10 percent had sent naked pictures of themselves to someone else via their cell phone.

What is surprising is that although a majority of those surveyed sent their pictures and sexual messages to a significant other, 29 percent had sent a message to someone they knew online and not in person.

Even if some believe sexting is all in good fun, Detective Darrel King, a forensic analyst for Fort Collins Police Services, said it's not so simple. King investigates cases involving computers, online networks and cell phones on a daily basis. And he can find messages and files on a cell phone that many believe they had deleted.

So what happens next? Once information is put onto the web or shared via phone, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to get it back.

"There's no such thing as temporary, so don't send anything you don't want to have absolute control over," King said. "You can be brought up on charges for distributing explicit material, especially if the subject of the photo is a minor. In that instance, you can be charged with distribution of child pornography."

King investigates cases of all natures, but when it comes



photo illustration by chelsea duffee