

Insecure teens use social media to harass, threaten dating partner

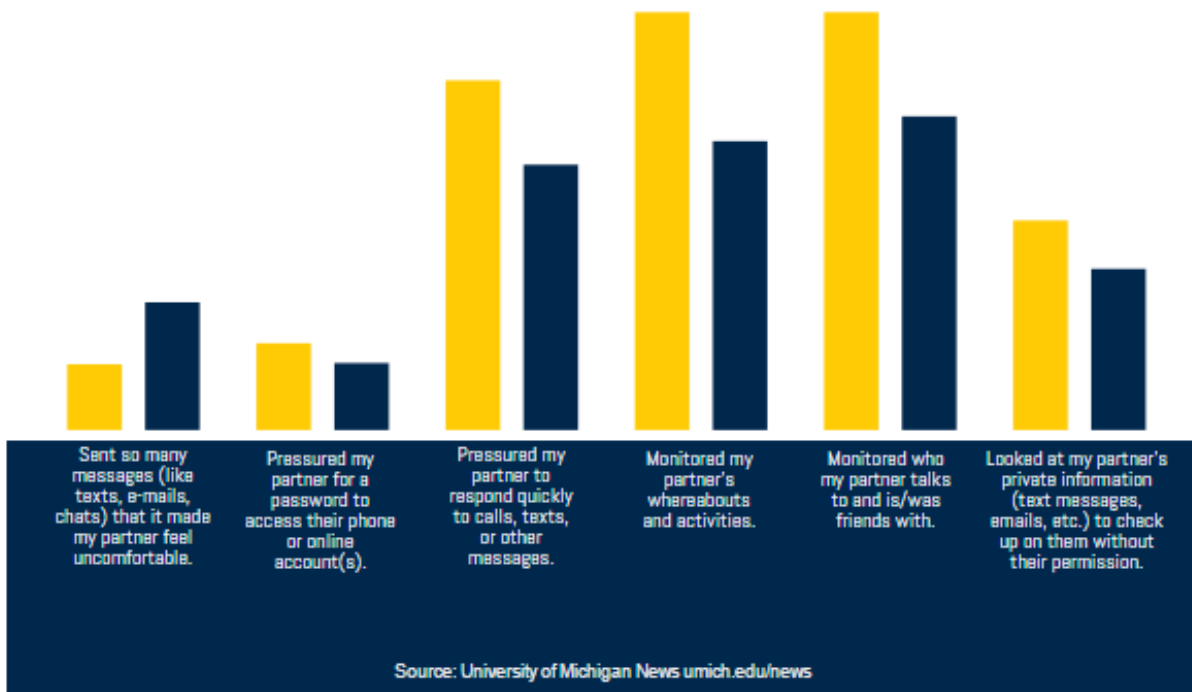
February 9 2016, by Jared Wadley



INVASION OF PRIVACY

University of Michigan researchers surveyed 9th-12th graders about their electronic intrusion habits.

■ Girls ■ Boys



A teen girl gets delayed text messages from her boyfriend. She feels a bit anxious and wonders if her partner is cheating.

If she sends her boyfriend numerous text messages asking where he is or checks his cell phone without permission to calm her anxiety, she is engaging in "digital dating abuse," experts say.

This online stalking behavior is described as electronic intrusion—and it's common in high school dating relationships, according to University of Michigan researchers in a new study that continues their work with college students.

Insecure teens use social media to create a "cycle of anxiety," in which platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram serve as both a trigger for relationship anxiety and a tool for partner surveillance to alleviate anxiety.

And while [digital media](#) can have positive impacts on dating relationship quality and closeness, electronic intrusive behavior may negatively affect the partner's mental health and sense of security in the relationship, said Lauren Reed, the study's lead author. These behaviors could escalate to emotional abuse and dating violence.

"For anxiously attached individuals, access to digital information about a dating partner coupled with the capability for constant contact may make it difficult to negotiate digital boundaries," said Reed, a doctoral student from the U-M Department of Psychology.

Reed and colleagues surveyed about 700 [high school](#) students who were asked about their current or most recent relationship, as well as the frequency of using the Internet and digital media. Students reported they sent or received between 51-100 text messages per day, and spent about 22 hours per week using social media.

They often monitored a partner's whereabouts and activities using [social media](#), such as who a partner talks to and pressuring a [partner](#) to respond quickly to calls and messages.

Girls more frequently engaged in electronic intrusion, spent more hours social networking and experienced higher anxiety levels than boys, Reed said. In fact, girls considered electronic intrusion a necessary component to maintaining a relationship.

Meanwhile, boys use electronic intrusion to maintain their control in relationships, she said.

The findings appear in *Computers in Human Behavior*.

More information: Lauren A. Reed et al. Keeping tabs: Attachment anxiety and electronic intrusion in high school dating relationships, *Computers in Human Behavior* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2015.12.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.12.019)

Provided by University of Michigan

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