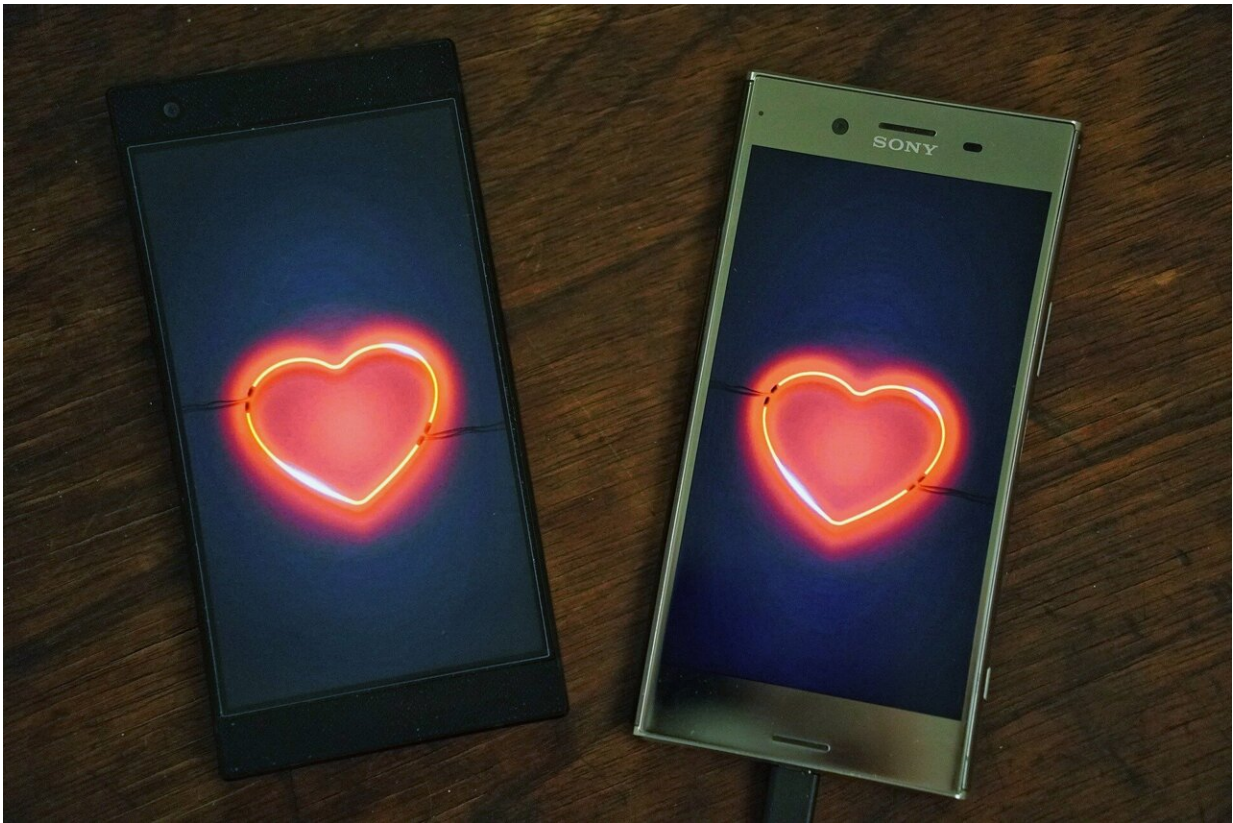


Preteens use dating apps, and 1 in 4 are sexual minorities: Study

May 22 2024



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Though most online dating apps have a minimum age requirement of 18 years, a new study finds that a small number of 11–12 year-olds use them. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) preteens are 13 times more

likely to report engaging in online dating compared to their heterosexual peers.

The research is [published](#) in the journal *BMC Research Notes*.

"Lesbian, gay, or bisexual adolescents, including preteens, may have limited romantic partner options in their schools, where they may also face discrimination, bullying, and stigma because of their [sexual orientation](#)," says lead author Jason Nagata, MD, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco. "Dating apps may allow adolescents to easily identify other LGB users in close geographic proximity, whereas it may be more difficult to determine a potential partner's sexual orientation in real life."

The researchers analyzed data from 10,157 adolescents, mostly 11 to 12 year-olds, who are part of the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study, the largest long-term study of brain development and [child health](#) in the United States. Data were collected from 2018-2020. Adolescents answered questions about [online dating](#) app use and their sexual orientation.

The study also found that preteen boys were nearly three times more likely to report online dating compared to girls.

"Preteen boys are more likely than girls to report that [social media](#) made them feel more connected with their significant other," says co-author Kyle T. Ganson, Ph.D., assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. "Prior research has found that half of boys reported that social media made them feel more emotionally connected with their significant other, compared to 37% of girls."

The higher rates of online dating in LGB and male preteens may reflect trends in general screen use. A related [study](#) found that LGB preteens

spend four more hours per day on screens in general, including television, videos, social media, and texting, than their heterosexual peers. Similarly, preteen boys spend 45 more minutes of total screen time daily than girls.

"Although online media can have benefits such as connection and socialization for LGB adolescents, parents and media literacy programs should provide guidance to mitigate risks from online dating such as cyberbullying, grooming, exploitation, privacy violations, and the exchanging of inappropriate content," Nagata says. "Parents should talk to their [adolescents](#) about media usage, including online dating, and develop rules through a family media use plan."

More information: Jason M. Nagata et al, Social epidemiology of online dating in U.S. early adolescents, *BMC Research Notes* (2024). [DOI: 10.1186/s13104-024-06777-w](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-024-06777-w)

Provided by University of Toronto

Citation: Preteens use dating apps, and 1 in 4 are sexual minorities: Study (2024, May 22) retrieved 16 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-05-preteens-dating-apps-sexual-minorities.html>

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