

The Washington Post

Why teens are 'sexting'

Thursday, December 11, 2008

What a study says about kids texting nude photos of themselves

Best opinion: Salon, BeliefNet, Wash. Post



What happened

An online poll found that 20 percent of teens had sent X-rated photos or videos of themselves to a boyfriend or girlfriend, or posted them online. A third of young adults ages 20 to 26 said they had done it. ([USA Today](#))

What the commentators said

This is nothing to panic about, said [Tracy Clark-Flory in Salon](#). “Sexting”—sending nude photos by cell phone—raises legitimate concerns—especially when the images get shared with unintended viewers. But it doesn’t mean technology is turning kids into amateur porn stars. It just shows that sexual experimentation, like everything else, has “gone digital.”

So, said [Erin Manning in BeliefNet](#), it’s OK for teens to trade X-rated photos and pornographic text messages as long as nobody gets hurt? Maybe if you see zero value in “such virtues as modesty, chastity, or restraint.” But, even in this day and age, there are people who object to this kind of behavior on moral grounds.

Yes, and some of them are called parents, said [Stacey Garfinkle in The Washington Post online](#). But there are ways for moms and dads to discourage sexting, and they don't even have to ban camera phones. Just make sure your kids know messages and pictures they send over the Internet or on cell phones are never truly private. And go digital along with them, monitoring their behavior and friends in cyberspace the same way you do in “real life.”

Jesse Logan: The consequences of 'sexting'

Friday, March 6, 2009

How dangerous is the sexting fad, and will it last?

Best opinion: MSNBC, Intelligencer, Fast Company

The "sexting" trend is landing teenagers in trouble across the country, said [Mike Celiznic in MSNBC](#), but it cost Jessica Logan, 18, her life. The teenager did what many teens are doing—she sent nude photos of herself via cell-phone text message to her boyfriend. But when they broke up, he allegedly shared the images with other girls, and after enduring months of shame and embarrassment, Logan's mother told *Today's* Matt Lauer, the teenager hanged herself in her bedroom.

This fad "needs to be stopped," said [the Wheeling, W.Va., *Intelligencer* in an editorial](#). "'Sexting' can do terrible emotional damage to its victims—even if they also happen to be perpetrators." But police, educators, and parents need to handle each case carefully, because treating "foolish teenagers" like grown-up sex offenders can heighten the shame and do them more harm than good.

Police don't know how to handle these cases, said [Chris Dannen in *Fast Company*](#), because child pornography laws seem out of place when the kids themselves are the pornographers. But the grown-ups should take a deep breath and calm down. This isn't a social revolution that will turn all our kids into amateur porn stars—it's a fad that's happening because kids suddenly have a new technology to play with. Scary, yes, but it won't last.

‘Sexting’: When a fad is a felony

Friday, April 10, 2009

Should teenagers be arrested and charged with a crime for sexting?

Marisa Miller, 15, may not look like your typical child pornographer, said Erin Nissley in the Scranton, Pa., *Times-Tribune*, but appearances can deceive. When a “provocative” photo of bra-clad Miller turned up on a male classmate’s cell phone, Wyoming County District Attorney George Skumanick threatened her and several other students with child-porn charges. To avoid arrest as a sex offender and possible time in jail, Skumanick said, Miller would have to complete a five-week class on the dangers of pornography and sexual violence. Miller thus became the latest high-schooler to find herself facing criminal charges for “sexting”—a fad in which teens take nude or semi-nude photos on cell phone cameras and send them to friends. But unlike the defendants in previous “sexting” cases, said Sean Hamill in *The New York Times*, Miller is fighting back. With the backing of their parents and the American Civil Liberties Union, Miller and two co-defendants sued Skumanick, claiming he filed the draconian charges in “retaliation” for their refusal to bend to his legal blackmail.

Sorry, but I’m siding with the prosecutor, said Brent Bozell in *Townhall.com*. He doesn’t want to put Miller in jail; he’s trying to teach her, and her classmates, an important lesson about “a toxic trend.” A recent survey found that one in five teens has sent or posted a nude photo of himself or herself, and nearly a third said they’d received one. These photos often are widely distributed, causing shame and damaged reputations. Last year, an Ohio girl was horrified when a nude photo she’d sent to a boyfriend was distributed to four high schools, and students began calling her “whore.” After weeks of this abuse, she hanged herself. “Sexting” is out of control, and “parents and prosecutors alike are correct to put the brakes on this mistake.”

Good luck with that, said Nancy Gibbs in *Time*. “Every parent understands that handing over the car keys marks a fateful passage,” but cell phones have proved to be just as dangerous—and subversive. Teens already have figured out how to text under desks without looking down, and how to set their phones with ringtones pitched too high for their adult teachers to hear. They use their cells to cheat on tests, order drugs, bully classmates—and send one another nude photos. Unfortunately, parents and prosecutors are fighting on teens’ turf. “They are up in the trees and underground and in caves while we march around in our bright red uniforms, trying to defend their dignity and virtue.”

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