

Sexting & the Pornographic Imagination

David Rosen

Media In Transition, MIT

May 3, 2013

WHERE THE “DIGITAL PUBLIC, DIGITAL PRIVATE” INTERSECT

***“Tamed as it may be,
sexuality remains one of the demonic forces in human consciousness –
pushing us at intervals close to taboo and dangerous desires ...”***

Susan Sontag

SEXTING DEFINED

SEXTING IS AN ORIGINAL FORM OF PORNOGRAPHY

It involves mostly young girls taking, sending and receiving explicit nude or semi-nude still images or video clips of themselves via smartphones or other mobile communication devices.

Sexing culminates nearly 2 centuries of modern aesthetics.



SEXTING IS A LEGAL & POLITICAL ISSUE

SEXTING IS A CRIME IN 13 STATES

Teens & adults are being arrested.

Political figures have lost their positions caught sending *sexts*.

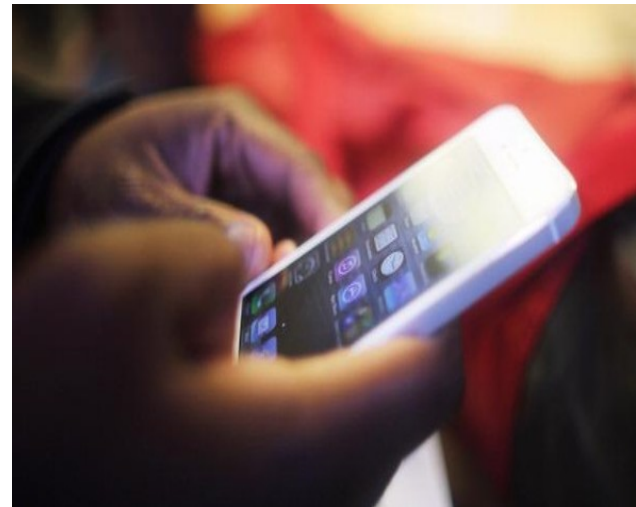


SEXTING: SOCIAL & TECHNOLOGICAL

SEXTING IS COMMUNICATION

It is a 21ST century digital media.

**It requires a smart handheld device,
a 3G or 4G wireless network,
Internet connectivity & be affordable.**



SEXTING: TEEN SEXUALITY

SEXTING IS FOREPLAY

It is a form of high-tech flirting.

**Few sexts depict sex acts.
It is age-appropriate postmodern contact.
It does not involve pedophiles.
It does not involve sexual commerce.**

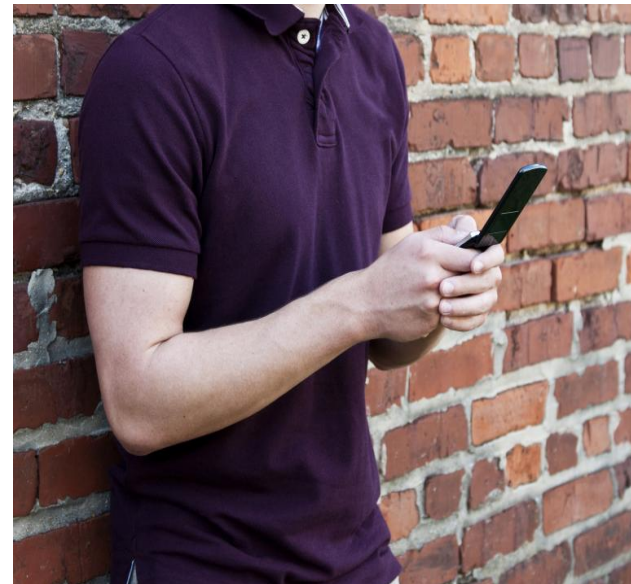


SEXTING: PORNOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION

SEXTING IS A POSTMODERN AESTHETIC

**It culminates 2 centuries of the technological evolution of
in the representation of the *obscene*.**

**It remains predominantly patriarchal,
displaying many more young girls than boys.
It remains predominantly heterosexual, displaying few gay males or females.**



SEXTING'S HISTORY: PHOTOGRAPH

"Possessing a compelling illusion of three-dimensionality and preternatural detail, painstakingly tinted, entirely grainless, the visual effect of the hand-colored daguerreotype stereo is the acme of verisimilitude."

Abigail Solomon-Godeau



SEXTING'S HISTORY: EDISON KINETOSCOPE

"... The view was that of Carmencita in her famous butterfly dance, and Senator James Bradley, the founder of Asbury Park amusement park, watched the graceful gyrations of the lovely Spanish dancer with interest that was ill-concealed.

"But near the end of the series of pictures the Spanish beauty gives the least little bit of kick, which raises her silken draperies so that her well-turned ankles peep out and there is a background of white lace."

Newark Evening New, July 17, 1894



SEXTING'S HISTORY: MOTION PICTURES

***"The very darkness of the room is an added attraction to many young people,
for whom the space is filled with the glamour of love making."***

Jane Addams



SEXTING'S HISTORY: PEEPSHOW BOOTH

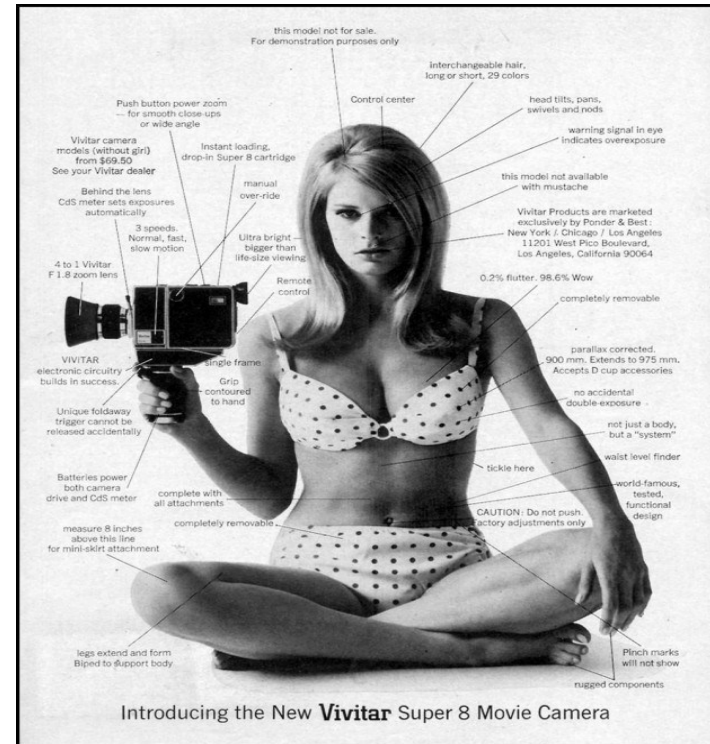
"It has been estimated that peep shows are the biggest moneymaking portion of the [adult pornography] industry."

U.S. Attorney General's commission on pornography, 1986



MODERN PORNOGRAPHY: DIY HOMEVIDEO

By the late-'80s, DIY video porn accounted for 30 percent of new video releases.



SEXTING'S HISTORY: DIGITAL INTERACTIVITY

Graphic artist Mike Saenz introduced "Virtual Valerie" in 1990, an erotic computer game on a floppy disk and then a CD-ROM; it enabled the (male) user to repeatedly insert a dildo into Valerie's vagina.



POSTMODERN PORNOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION

SEXTING: THE 21ST CENTURY'S 1ST ORIGINAL FORM OF PORNOGRAPHY

**Sexting incorporates the lessons of postmodern consumer culture,
a culture saturated by female erotic display.
It is a ritual in the sexualization of postmodern teens.**

**It fashions an erotic aesthetic shaped by mobile devices;
they have a very small display or aspect ratio,
the iPhone is a postmodern version of the postcard.**

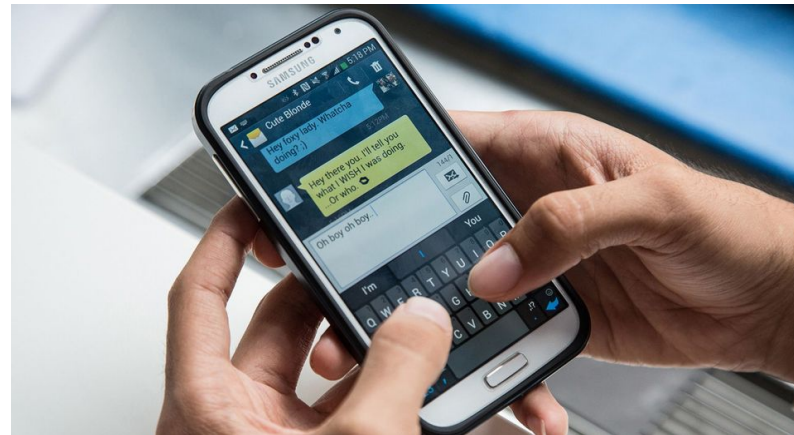


POSTMODERN PORNOGRAPHY IMAGINATION

SEXTING: THE 21st CENTURY'S 1ST ORIGINAL FORM OF PORNOGRAPHY

It is the marketplace undercutting Bush-era teen sex policies, of abstinence sex ed, anti-choice, no Plan B and creationism.

**Sexting subverts traditional porn in three ways:
it involves teen makers and viewers;
it involves erotic display without sex;
and it is a noncommercial form of flirting, sexual engagement.**



POSTMODERN PORNOGRAPHY IMAGINATION

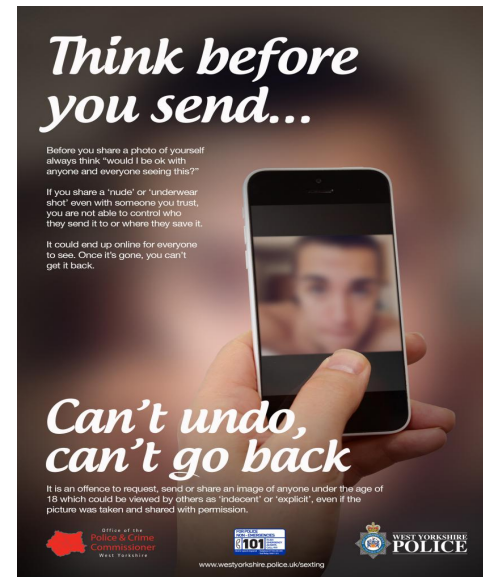
SEXTING'S FUTURE

**Will it continue to principally be a form of flirting among young people,
or be adopted by other adults?**

**Will it continue to principally depict heterosexual females?,
or will it equally depict both males and females, straights and gays?**

**Will it continue to principally depict "non-exploitative" sex activities?,
or will it become increasingly specialized, fetishized?**

**Will it continue to be a form of noncommercial sharing?,
or will it become just another sex business, including solicitation?**



Credits:

1. Image Credit: [Photos.com](#)
2. Daguerreotype – Jaques Moulin, 1850s

Kinetoscope parlor in San Francisco, ca. 1894

Courtesy Edison National Historic Site

The Kiss -- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zURTEs8C1lo>

<http://momfaze.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/sexting.jpg>

https://www.westyorkshire.police.uk/sites/default/files/images/misc/sexting_poster_male.jpg

<http://i.amz.mshcdn.com/BngG9pwPddhUd-VyLLPwvc4glEo=/950x534/2013%2F08%2F09%2F05%2FSextingnonu.ae75d.jpg>

<http://techcrunch.com/2009/10/10/bare-it-all-in-hd-69adgets-diy-guide-to-homemade-sex-tapes/>