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Teen Sexting: What Should Be Done About It?

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TEEN SEXTING: What should be done about it?

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Question

- Do you think teens today are _____ sexually active than their parents generation?
 - More
 - Less
 - About the same

Question

- How does how we think about teens shape what we think should be done regarding sex education?

**FLIES SPREAD
DISEASES
SO KEEP YOURS
ZIPPED.**



ABSTINENCE

Do as I say, not as I do.

Question

- How does how we think about teens shape what we think should be done about issues like sexting?
- If we believe teens have “gone wild,” it will affect what we think should be done.
- *Question:* Where do we get our ideas about what teens today are doing (sexually or otherwise)?

The Role of Media

- TV Show: *Scarborough Country* ...
 - Kids gone wild, children out of control, experimenting with sex before they reach their teens, using drugs and going on violent rampages in schools ... What should concerned parents do?.
- (Joe Scarborough, Host, 11/13/2003)



The Role of Media

- Given how the media talks about teens and sex, when the concept of sexting emerged it received a lot of media attention.
- The issue of “sexting” came to the attention of the public in 2008.
 - The stories first ran in local papers until the Associated Press picked up the story in June.

The Role of Media

- Associated Press Story:
 - Passing notes in study hall or getting your best friend to ask a boy if he likes you or, you know, LIKES you, is so last century. Nowadays, teenagers are snapping naked pictures of themselves on their cell phones and sending them to their boyfriends and girlfriends. Many of these pictures are falling into the wrong hands or worse, everyone's hands, via the Internet and leading to criminal charges. Some parents are aghast.

The Role of Media

- After the Associated Press Story, television started covering sexting and warning parents and kids of the dangers of sexting.
 - All the major networks ran stories on sexting.



The Role of Media

- *Question:* At any given time, there are many issues going on in society. Why do you think sexting broke through and received so much attention?

The Role of Media

- NBC's Today Show hosts discuss sexting ...
- Vieira: And then a really disturbing story for parents. You might call this "sexting," teens sending nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves on their cell phones or online. A staggering number are doing it. One out of five teenage girls say they are; almost as many boys. We're going to talk about why they do it and the repercussions, a real warning for parents out there.
- Lauer: They may not think it has repercussions now in the short term.
- Vieira: But it does.
- Lauer: But this could affect them long down the road.

The Role of Media

- An expert on the CBS *Early Show* warned viewers about sexting:
 - Captain George Seranko (Greensburg Police): It's very dangerous, and it could come back and harm not only the victim that took the picture, but their families.
- *Question:* Are the news stories correct? Is sexting dangerous, especially among teens?

The Role of Media

- If we conclude that sexting is dangerous or harmful to teens, then we have to decide what should be done about it.
 - Criminalization approach
 - Educational approach
 - Other?
- But, before we can decide how to address the sexting issue, we have to get our facts straight on teen sexual behavior.

Are today's teens (and pre-teens!) having sex at much younger ages?

- Media Hype ...
- “Even 10- and 11-year-olds, they knew how to say, 'Homework's done,' and then they knew how to have an orgy.”
 - --Michelle Burford on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (2003)

Are today's teens having sex at much younger ages?

■ DATA

- On average, teens in the U.S. begin having intercourse at age 17.
 - This is NOT a drastic change from their parents' era.
- When it comes to sexual behavior, teens in the U.S. are not dissimilar to teens in other English-speaking countries.

Are today's teens having sex at much younger ages?

■ DATA

- The percentage of teens ages 15-19 who report having had sexual intercourse has significantly decreased over the past twenty years or so.

Are today's teens having sex at much younger ages?

■ DATA

- The percentage of high school students who have ever had sexual intercourse fell
 - 54.1% in 1991
 - 47.4% in 2011
- It is rare for kids to have sex for the first time before age 13
 - 10.2% in 1991
 - 6.2% in 2011

Are today's teens promiscuous?

- Media Hype
- “Many [teens] engage in [oral sex] rather cavalierly with friends, or even people they barely know. Sharing each others genitals has become like sharing a cigarette, drink or joint in some circles.”
 - -- *Dr. Ruth's Guide to Teens & Sex Today*
 - *Note:* Dr. Ruth is one the most frequently interviewed experts on sex in society.

Are today's teens promiscuous?

■ Data

- Among females ages 15-17, just over a quarter (27.4%) report having given oral sex
- Although casual hookups happen among the young, the majority of sexual intercourse occurs within a relationship context (i.e. with a boyfriend or girlfriend).

Teen Sex & Social Problems

■ Data

- Two of the concerns many people have about teen sex are: pregnancy and STI/STD's.
- Those from poor backgrounds are significantly more likely to have a STI/STD or experience a pregnancy (or get someone pregnant) during their teen years.
- And, like teen sex in general, some of these problems have decreased in the past few decades.
 - *Example:* The teen birth rate in 2009 was 37% lower than it was in 1991.

Summary: Teen Sex

- Although many teens are sexually active, both in the U.S. and abroad, the hype about sex and today's teens has been grossly misleading.
 - The age teens begin having sex has **NOT** gotten dramatically younger in recent decades
 - Most teens are **NOT** having sex with a large number of partners
 - Most are **NOT** engaging in frequent, anonymous sexual intercourse
 - Teen pregnancy has decreased significantly

Sexting

- Now that we have our facts straight on teens and sex, let's return to deciding how to address the sexting problem.
 - If you favor an **educational approach**, give the specifics of a program you would recommend.
 - If you favor a **criminal justice approach**, write the legislation you would recommend.

Sexting Case in the News

- One case that made the news occurred in Orlando, Florida. An eighteen-year-old high school senior, Phillip, had naked photos of his sixteen-year-old girlfriend that she had previously “sexted” to him. One night, after an argument, he decided to forward those photos to everyone in his girlfriend’s email contact list, including her family members.
- **Question:** What, if anything, do you think should be done in cases like this?

Sexting Case in the News

- One case that made the news occurred in Orlando, Florida. An eighteen-year-old high school senior, Phillip, had naked photos of his sixteen-year-old girlfriend that she had previously “sexted” to him. One night, after an argument, he decided to forward those photos to everyone in his girlfriend’s email contact list, including her family members.
- **Question:** What, if anything, do you think should be done in cases like this?

Questions

- *Question:* If the image that is transmitted is not just of nudity, but of a sexual act, should that change how the case is handled?
- *Question:* Should the age of the person sexting factor into how the case is treated?
 - *Example:* High school vs. middle school age

Questions

- *Question:* How is the sexting issue linked to the larger issue of gender inequality in society?
- *Question:* Is sexting part of a larger social problem, such as: cyberbullying, invasion of privacy, teen dating abuse, or something else?

Conclusion

- If we want to devise policies (educational or criminal) on teen sexting, we first have to understand teen sexual behavior based on actual data, not media portrayals.
- We also have to think through the problem from all angles. Not one size fits all.
 - The person who sends the “sext”
 - The person who receives it
 - The person who forwards it