Sexting & cyberbullying
What are we dealing with?

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'Sexting'

• Nude or sexually explicit photo-sharing or text messages
• Usually via cellphones, but possible via other devices and Web
• Illegal when involving minors
• Overzealous prosecutors have charged teens with production, possession, distribution of child porn

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"Teen sexting: Troubling, but don't overreact"
http://www.connectsafely.org/Safety-Advice-Articles/teen-sexting-troubling-but-dont-overreact.html

"Sexting: The new 'spin-the-bottle'?"
http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/06/sexting-new-spin-bottle.html

"Teaching about sexting: Social Web lesson plan"
http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/06/teaching-about-sexting-social-web.html

"Sexting overblown? Yes and *no*"
http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/03/sexting-overblown-yes-and-no.html

"Fla. teen a registered sex offender for sexting"
http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/04/fl-teen-registered-sex-offender-for.html

Why do kids 'sext'?

- Teen "romance" – expression of shared intimacy with partner
- Flirting or relationship currency
- "Truth or Dare" (normative game gone very wrong)
- Peer pressure
- Revenge ("revenge porn")
- Bullying or intimidation ("pranks")
- Blackmail

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LOTS of reasons. They range from developmentally normative adolescent behavior to malicious intent to criminal intent.

E.g., "Revenge porn" in UrbanDictionary.com – "Homemade porn uploaded by ex-girlfriend or (usually) ex-boyfriend after particularly vicious breakup as a means of humiliating the ex or just for own amusement"

E.g., "Truth or Dare" – remember that classic middle school rite-of-passage sort of game? Rosalind Wiseman of *Queen Bees & Wannabes* tells of how, up until a few years ago, when 7th and 8th grade girls played it at slumber parties, there were no serious consequences, but now – when it's "I dare you to take a naked photo of yourself and send it to the boy you like" and the girl does it because of all that peer pressure from their homies – the consequences can be very serious!

Note that the boys only get involved later.

My blog post: http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/12/sexting-new-study-truth-or-dare.html

Annie Fox interview of Rosalind Wisemand

http://blog.anniefox.com/2009/12/07/podcast-queen-bees-go-hi-tech/

"Sexting: The peer pressure factor" <http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/09/sexting-peer-pressure-factor.html>

Possible non-legal consequences

- Emotional or reputational damage
- School discipline
- Invisible viewership – can be forwarded to *anyone*
- Potentially searchable on the Web, possibly *forever*

Sweet.

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...and – though it's unwise to base policy on them – can't rule out the more severe consequences entirely.

http://www.connectsafely.org/Safety-Tips/tips-to-prevent-sexting.html

Possible legal consequences

- Potential for child-porn production, distribution, or possession charges
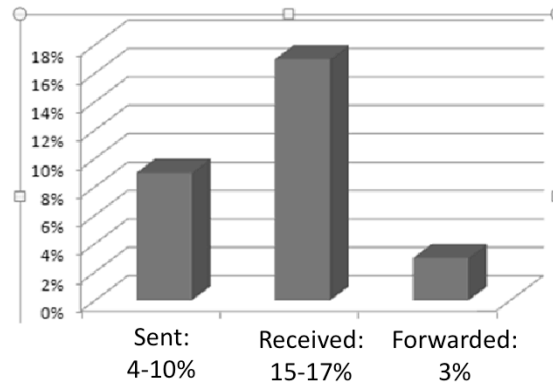- Could be required by state law to register as a sex offender

Sweet.

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Please see...

• "FL teen a registered sex offender for sexting," April 2009 <http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/04/fl-teen-registered-sex-offender-for.html>

• "US sex-offender laws, registries not conducive to child safety" <http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/08/us-sex-offender-laws-registries-not.html>,

• "More on sex-offender registry flaws" <http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/09/more-on-sex-offender-registry-flaws.html>, and...

• Other coverage in NetFamilyNews.org <http://www.netfamilynews.org/labels/teen%20sex%20offenders.html>

See also **ConnectSafely.org's "Tips to Prevent Sexting"**: http://www.connectsafely.org/Safety-Tips/tips-to-prevent-sexting.html

How common is sexting?

Earliest study reported that 20% of US teens had sent a sexting message. ***The latest study found 4% had.***

Sent: 4-10% Received: 15-17% Forwarded: 3%

Sources: Harris Interactive/Cox/NCMEC 5/09; AP/MTV 12/09; Pew 12/09

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Here's the data picture after <u>several</u> studies. The **AP/MTV survey** released in Dec. (12/3/09) – was about *<u>digital abuse</u>*, not just sexting, as the headlines implied. Digital abuse is defined as "spreading lies, violation of trust, and digital disrespect" – what we really need to focus on in online safety going forward. **This is about trust and respect – for self and others.** The 50% figure you may've seen in some headlines refers to the percentage of *youth who have experienced "digital abuse from the mild to the extreme."* The MTV/AP study also found that 45% of sexually active youth report being involved with sexting (another confirmation of the ISTTF finding that those most at risk offline are those most at risk online).

Pew – which looked only at sexting as <u>photos shared on phones</u> – also found that 1) older teens are more likely to engage in sexting, 2) there was no gender difference, 3) more intense cellphone users are more likely to receive sext messages, and sexting is higher among kids not on family cellphone plans (e.g., who pay for their own phones or have stealth phones a boy or girlfriend gave them).

How young people *view* sexting is complex & individual: those who've engaged in it see it as everything from "hot" ... and "trusting"... to "uncomfortable"... and "slutty," and those who *don't* engage in it call it "gross," "uncomfortable," and "stupid."

[The explanation for Pew's lower (4%) figure may be that it focused solely on images on cellphones because that's the scenario where child porn law kicks in.]

• http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/06/sexting-picture-bit-clearer-maybe.html, links to Cox/Harris Interactive survey

• 12/09 AP/MTV study on digital abuse that includes sexting: http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/12/new-study-on-digital-abuse-youth.html (links to study exec summ)

• 12/09 Pew study http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/12/sexting-new-study-truth-or-dare.html

The sexting messages went to...

- Boyfriend or girlfriend   20%
- Someone had a crush on 21%
- Ex-boyfriend/girlfriend   19%
- Best friend   14%
- Friends   18%
- Someone I don't know   11%
- Classmates   4%
- Someone else   14%
- Declined to answer   3%

Source: Cox Communications Teen Online & Wireless Safety Survey, 2009

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A survey specifically on sexting and cyberbullying earlier last year (sponsored by Cox Communications) found sext messages went to a diverse array of recipients.

Did bad things happen after sexting messages were sent?

2% – "Photo was forwarded to an authority figure and I got in trouble."

1% – "Photo was posted online where many people could see it."

4% – "The person I sent the photo to threatened to send it to someone else."

2% – "I accidentally sent the photo to the wrong person."

2% – "The person I sent the photo to made fun of me."

2% – "The photo was forwarded to someone I didn't want to see it"

Source: Cox Communications Teen Online & Wireless Safety Survey, 2009

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90% of teens surveyed who'd sent sext messages said "nothing bad happened" as a result, so It's helpful to keep in mind that – though the potential impacts can be horrendous (from serious emotional harm to sex offender registries) – the vast majority of incidents had little impact, thank goodness.

At the conference, someone asked if kids always knew if something bad happened. I'm not sure the research went into that, but I think they would know. It would get back to them if the consequences were bad.

What should a parent do?

- Have a family discussion, explain consequences
- If happens...
  - Stay calm
  - Make sure they *stop immediately*
- If image received, tell them *not to forward it*
- Talk with other parents & teens involved
- Think carefully before involving police (could implicate your own child)
- ***More advice at ConnectSafely.org/sexting***

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When law enforcement needs to be involved

Image: Norman Rockwell "The Runaway"
1958 *Saturday Evening Post* cover

- If intimidation, blackmail or extortion is involved
- If peer is distributing the images
- If minor is groomed or pressured by an adult

Ideally, __education__ is law enforcement's primary role.

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Cyberbullying & harassment

- Risk that affects the most children
- Studies differ: 2 nat'l studies found 33%; latest says 19% have been bullied, 10% have bullied
- *Harassment* more common (75% of teens surveyed by UCLA study)
- 40% of online bullying is retaliation for in-school (offline) bullying/harassment (Agatston, et al)
- *Only 10% report to adults*
- *Developmental* more than technological problem

Sources: Patchin and Hinduja, 2006; Pew/Internet, 2007; Journal of School Health, 9/08; UNH's CACRC, 2007

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ALSO AMONG THE HANDFUL OF KEY FINDINGS OF THE TASK FORCE REPORT: CYBERBULLYING = MOST PREVALENT RISK.

One of the key findings in a Stanford University graduate student's just-released study is that *"there is a significant knowledge gap between the concepts of virtual identity and real-life consequences."*

Patti Agatston on a Kowalski/Limber study (Clemson) she presented w/ them in 2008: "61% of cyberbullying 'victims' also reported being targets of traditional bullying; 55% of those who reported cyberbullying others reported that they had also bullied others in traditional ways. **There is also a group we label as "bully/victims" who cyberbully others; are cyberbullied; and are *also very involved in traditional forms of bullying (64% reported being targets of bullying and 66% reported bullying others*).**

Two national studies found that about 1/3 of US 12-to-17-year-olds have been victimized by cyberbullying
http://www.netfamilynews.org/2007/06/cyberbullying-in-us-fresh-insights.html

UCLA study in Journal of School Health, 9/08, more about harassment in general, not just cyberbullying
http://www.newsroom.ucla.edu/portal/ucla/bullying-of-teenagers-online-is-64265.aspx (link from NetFamilyNews
http://www.netfamilynews.org/2008/10/online-harassment-not-telling-parents.html)

'Cyberbullying' defined

- 1) willful repeated aggression; 2) associated with real life; 3) power imbalance
- **Bully/victim overlap** - 27% of teen girls "bully back"
- **Online/offline**: The environment is school life, *not* the Internet
- **How anonymous?** 36% know bully at school; 28% "know" bully online; 20% *don't* know who bully is

Sources: UNH CACRC, '07; Agatston, Kowalski, Limber, '09; Burgess-Proctor, Hinduja, Patchin, '09

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Though kids who'd experience cyberbullying said they'd felt sad, upset, violated, depressed, hated, stupid & put down, annoyed, and exploited, they also felt the bullies were stupid, pathetic, bored, and didn't have anything better to do – and 55% indicated that being cyberbullied had "no negative effect" on them. These "attitudes of dismissal" were particularly common in cases of harassment rather than cyberbullying, however.

--"Victimization of Adolescent Girls" – Amanda Burgess-Proctor, Sameer Hinduja, and Justin Patchin <http://www.cyberbullying.us/cyberbullying_girls_victimization.pdf>

"Cyberbullying better defined" <http://www.netfamilynews.org/2008/09/cyberbullying-better-defined.html>

2009 ISTTF report, pp. 19-20 "With all three types of threats (sexual solicitation, online harassment, and problematic content), **some youth are more likely to be at risk than others**. Generally speaking, the characteristics of youth who report online victimization are similar to those of youth reporting offline victimization and those who are vulnerable in one online context are often vulnerable in multiple contexts (Finkelhor 2008). In the same way, **those identified as "high risk" (i.e., experienced sexual abuse, physical abuse or parental conflict) were twice as likely to receive online solicitations** (Mitchell et al. 2008) and a variety of psychosocial factors (such as substance use, sexual aggression, and poor bonds with caregivers) were correlated with online victimization (Ybarra et al. 2007b, 2007c)."

Girls more than boys

- Girls cyberbully more than boys (13% vs 9%)

- Girls also targeted more than boys (25% vs 11%)

- "Weapons": insults, ostracism, rumors, shared secrets

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Robin Kowalski, PhD, in Psychiatric Times, 10/1/'08 <http://www.psychiatrictimes.com/display/article/10168/1336550>

Signs of cyberbullying

- Loss of friends
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loss of sleep
- Doesn't want to go to school
- Covers screen or turns off device when others enter room*

*Can also be a sign of an inappropriate online relationship

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These signs are important for parents to be aware of, but let's hope it doesn't get this far before their child has talked with them about the problem.

Unfortunately, according to one study at UCLA (which did not distinguish between "cyberbullying" and "harassment," however), only 10% of youth report cyberbullying to trusted adults (see "Online harassment: Not telling parents" http://www.netfamilynews.org/2008/10/online-harassment-not-telling-parents.html).

[See also ConnectSafely.org's "Tips to Help Stop Cyberbullying" http://www.connectsafely.org/safety-tips/safety-tips/tips-to-help-stop-cyberbullying.html.]

What to tell kids facing cyberbullying

- *Don't react* (what the bully usually wants)
- Don't retaliate
- Block the bully
- Save the evidence
- Talk to a trusted adult

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There are all important but very general – certainly each incident is unique and needs caring individual treatment – a full, nonconfrontational, child-caregiver discussion that looks at the situation's circumstances.

School counselor I spoke with several years ago would find out all the parties involved, get them in a room, and do bully-victim reverse role-playing (**empathy training**).

In families and schools, some of these incidents can be turned into TEACHABLE MOMENTS (maybe anonymized?) for all parties' benefit.

Cyberbullying & sexting: When schools can intervene

Case law not clear-cut...

- 1969 Tinker case said that schools can't punish non-disruptive speech
- 1983 Fraser case said schools can punish lewd & disruptive speech
- Need to find a "nexus" between speech and school
- In Latour v. Riverside Beaver School District, judge said to determine whether speaker means to communicate intent to do serious bodily harm
- AB v. Indiana: Court in 2007 ruled in favor of student who created a MySpace page critical of school policy - deemed protected political speech

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The first week of this month (2/4/10), the 3RD CIRCUIT federal court of appeals in Philadelphia handed down 2 decisions that only added to the confusion – 1 FOR the STUDENT, 1 FOR the SCHOOL, MAKING it LIKELY THIS WILL GO TO SUPREME COURT SOON.

In one case the judges on one panel said "school officials in Mercer County [Penn.] cannot reach into a family's home and police the Internet." That case involved a MySpace parody of a principal created by a student at home. In the other case, the judges "upheld the suspension of a PA 8th-grader who posted sexually explicit material along with her principal's photo on a fake MySpace page."[http://www.netfamilynews.org/2010/02/student-free-speech-to-supreme-court.html]

Student free speech and "material disruption" of learning process – whether off-campus activity can cause the latter, historically a key test for schools - http://www.ciconline.org/thresholdsummer09 – "It Didn't Happen at School, But..."

Whole-school approach needed

"Because a bully's success depends heavily on context, attempts to prevent bullying should concentrate primarily on changing the context rather than directly addressing the victim's or the bully's behavior."
—Yale psych. Professor Alan Yazdin

"Cyberbullying really speaks to a school's culture of dignity."

—Author Rosalind Wiseman

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That, Yazdin and his co-author Carlo Rotella of Boston College, add, involves "the entire school, including **administration**, **teachers**, and **peers**."

• *Don't* do a 45-min. assembly on cyberbullying and be done with it, Wiseman advises schools. "That's a waste of time. Have a faculty meeting, and then have a parent meeting, and tell the students this is what you're doing – not just a bullying assembly. Tell them 'we understand this is about the whole culture of the school, and as part of that culture, you have to participate in this as well" — increases "the chance of students believing you're not completely full of it."

• Each incident gets turned into a "teachable moment" that becomes a step in creating that culture of dignity. Incidents involve investigations, so here's what they're for "The immediate goal of the investigation is not discipline [and certainly not expediency] but rather support for the targeted student(s) [who may be experiencing psychological harm], and restoration of order. The ultimate goal is to create a learning opportunity for all involved. The learning opportunity should be on-the-spot, as well as school and community-wide, and focus on the areas of critical thinking, mindful decision-making, perspective-taking, and citizenship."

[See:"Sexting & Youth" at the Center for Safe & Responsible Internet Use http://www.csriu.org/documents/sextingandyouth_002.pdf and a sexting investigation protocol for schools http://www.csriu.org/documents/sextinginvestigationandintervention_000.pdf Also: "Clicks, cliques & cyberbullying, Part 2: Whole-school response is key" http://www.netfamilynews.org/2010/02/clicks-cliques-cyberbullying-part-2.html]

Thank you!

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