Boobs, back-off, six packs and bits: Mediated body parts, gendered reward, and sexual shame in teens' sexting images

# Details

## Year

2015

## DOI

10.1080/10304312.2015.1022952

## Issued

2015

## Language

English

## Volume

29

## Issue

2

## Start Page

## End Page

## Authors

Ringrose J.;Harvey L.

## Type

Journal article

## Journal

Continuum

## Publisher

Informa UK Limited

## Topics

## Sample

35 young people aged 13–15 years from two London schools

# Abstract

In this paper, we explore a contemporary panic around teen sexting considering why it
focuses mostly on girls’ bodies and ‘breasts’. Drawing on empirical findings from
research with 13- and 15-year olds in two London schools, we ask: How are girls’ and
boys’ mediated bodies and body parts constructed, negotiated and made sense of in the
teen peer group? Howare images of girls’ breasts surveilled and owned by others? In what
ways can images of girls’ bodies be used to sexually shame them? How do images of
‘boobs’ work differently than those of ‘six-packs’ and ‘pecs’? When and how is digital
proof of sexual activity shamed or rewarded? Our analysis explores the affective
dimensions of digital affordances and how relative gendered value is generated through
socialmedia images and practices.Wedemonstrate how our qualitative research approach
facilitates exploration of the online and offline relational,material embodied performance
of negotiating gender and sexuality in teen’s digitally mediated peer cultures.

# Outcome

"we found images of girls’ bodies are highly sexually
regulated. Particularly, images connoting sexual attention seeking outside the cover of a
heterosexual relationship marked girls as ‘slutty’ and lacking ‘self-respect’. Boys, in
contrast, can gain value and reputational reward from possessing images of esteemed girls’
bodies and the implication of sexual services from girls, in the form of images or text.
Boys are rewarded for bodily displays of hard masculinity, highlighting shifts in
requirements for boys to increasingly engage in self-work on the body (Manago 2013).
However, the performance of heterosexual masculinity could be policed in relation to
shame around penis size and ridicule for association with, or implications of pleasuring
girls.
Despite clear gendered hierarchies around bodily display and sexual shame, young
people sometimes challenged these practices. There were inventive refusals of the
pressures around feminine ‘sexy’ bodily display and requests for an image of one’s body
parts, such as sending an image of a cat (pussy?). Some boys explicitly challenged the nonconsensual
sharing and posting of images as ‘sexist’, ‘not smart’ and undeserving of
respect. But there were highly gendered heteronormative performances of boys asking for
and girls refusing to send images of girls’ bodies and participants consistently positioned
girls who self-posted or sent ‘revealing’ images as lacking of ‘self-respect’. Consequently,
it seemed difficult for girls to display and perform the ‘sexy’ self in ways that implied
active sexual intent in their digital peer cultures." (Ringrose and Harvey, 2015: 214).