

Popularly referred to as 'sexting' and 'amateur pornography', images and videos have become an increasingly common component of adults' sex lives. However, existing literature has largely focused on young people's engagement with sexting.

This project examines the ways that adults understand and talk about creating sexualized images and videos. It explores the potential for digital technologies to both reinforce and expand different ways of thinking about sexual identity and intimacy. The findings from this study have implications for public health and sexual education programs.

Methods: In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 23 people in Australia, aged 25 - 75 years old. All participants had experience with nude, semi-nude, or suggestive photos, or erotic film making. Critical discourse analysis was used to analyse interview data.

- Adults do not relate to the language of 'sexting' or 'amateur pornography'. These terms are regarded to have negative connotations, such as with risk, or they are associated with young people, and did not reflect adults' experience of the practices.

I actually do it as well, but I just don't call it sexting, it doesn't really have a label for me I just like do it. (Lia, female, heterosexual, 27)

- Adults identify a variety of terms that work to position their practice in a positive light. This ranges from using language that describes the nature of the interaction, such as 'flirty' pictures to describing the content of the images, such as 'topless photo'. When describing amateur pornography, a distinction was made between 'erotic' and 'explicit' movies, distancing their practices from associations with pornography, or anything considered overly sexual. Instead, adults sought to encompass notions of intimacy, connection, artistic display and what is regarded as acceptable sexual display.

I do think there's a difference between erotic imagery and pornographic imagery. (Lee, male, heterosexual, 33)

- Adults describe relying on silence and context when communicating with others about their practice. These silences are linked to long held taboos and shame associated with talking about sex. In avoiding naming their sexual practice, adults decouple their sexual subjectivity from digital sexual cultures.

I don't discuss those things at all with anyone. (Emil, male, heterosexual, 45)

Talking about sexual practices has implications for individual identity and sexual subjectivity. Current terminology to talk about sexualized images and videos does not provide a sex positive language that is accessible to adults. This has implications for the ways that adults negotiate sexual consent, initiate sexual practice, and have conversations about sexual preferences and desires. As adults do not identify with terms such as 'sexting' and 'amateur pornography', health promoters and educators will need to carefully consider terms and language used when seeking to engage adults in messaging about digital sexual practices.

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(Not) Talking Dirty

The Absence of Positive Language for Adult Practices of Sexting and Amateur Pornography

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