

(Not) Talking Dirty: The Absence of Positive Language for Adult Practices of Sexting and Amateur Pornography

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Background:

Images and videos have become an increasingly common component of people's sex lives because of more accessible camera technology and digital connectivity. These practices have been popularly referred to as 'sexting' or amateur pornography. However, little is known about how adults understand and use terminology to refer to their production of sexualised imagery and video, with the bulk of literature focused primarily on young people. This paper explores how technologies facilitate new ways of talking about the production of sexually explicit images and videos produced by and for adults.

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. Participants were asked about the way sexual images/videos impact their sexual connections, their preferred language for talking about their practices, and with whom they speak about their practice. Interviews were analysed using critical discourse analysis techniques.

Results:

The findings showed participants had limited language for speaking about digital sexual practices, particularly language that was affirming or sex positive. Terms such as 'sexting' and amateur pornography were rejected in favour of de-sexualised language, such as 'artistic' or 'cheeky' photos. The use of non-sexualised terms and innuendo disassociated digital sexual practices from sex or sexual pleasure, despite participants also affirming that the pleasures afforded by digital camera technology were positive for their sex lives and relationships.

Conclusion:

The findings reflect a broad social discomfort and taboo with speaking about sex. A lack of a positive, shame-free language to speak about sexual practice has implications for the ways that adults negotiate sexual consent, initiate sexual practice, and have conversations about sexual preferences and desires.

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