

# Gen Sexting – the new villains and victims

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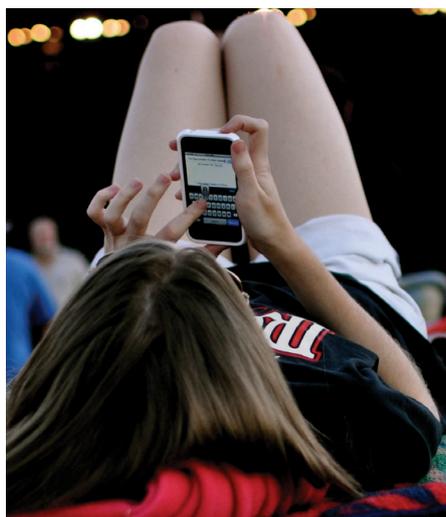
**A**ustralian children, in their thousands, have been victimised and intimidated, by depraved priests and teachers.

In the past, their sufferings were heightened, by a wide-spread official refusal to believe their complaints of sexual predation and paedophilia. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse brought fuller recognition of a problem that had existed largely unrecognised for many years. The abused children, many now adult psychiatric basket cases, could finally say “We told you so”.

Codes of Conduct and Child Protection legislation may now have made it a little harder for school place paedophiles to operate. It is unlikely, however, that the sexual abuse of children will ever be totally eliminated from our places of learning. Sexual predators will maintain their propensity to seek employment in those places where their unsuspecting prey are readily available.

And now, the problem of child abuse has turned a full 180 degrees. In a stunning societal reversal, we now see numerous children taking on the role of sexual abuser villains, with some naïve teachers becoming their intimidated victims. Teachers can no longer find general comfort in the belief that childhood is the age of innocence. Some of the hunted have now become hunters. Primary school-age children commonly access internet pornography, and many of them have a greater knowledge of exotic sexuality than their parents.

If we apply ‘generation labelling’ to the children of today, the appropriate term for many, might seem to be “Gen sexting”, with social media being in common use by teenagers, in their personal advertising of crudity and nudity.



Once upon a time, in a generation far, far away, teenage rites of passage were constituted by graduation ceremonies, passing out parades, debuts and valedictories. Today, increasingly, the teenage rite of passage is being boastfully portrayed in peer group parlance as losing one’s virginity at Schoolies Week, or being arrested for drunkenness or public nuisance.

Digital expertise has permitted some vindictive and malevolent juveniles to attack teachers via the social media. They photoshop head shot pictures of teachers with bodies performing abhorrent sexual acts, and then broadcast their cruel simulations through cyberspace.

Some of them have used social media to anonymously suggest that their teachers practise daily acts of bestiality and should seriously consider suicide, because of supposed general hatred by their students.

Teachers run the risk of becoming the victims of an inverted form of sexual abuse. It is difficult to attract male entrants to the profession, because of fears of false allegations, courtroom agony and

the prospects of possible professional destruction.

The teenage crush love letter has now morphed into the Facebook message, embarrassingly shared among collections of supporting crony cowards.

It’s no longer appropriate to laugh at teenage crush messages, like Paul Barringer, the much-admired English teacher in *Up the Down Staircase*. He laughed off teenage crush letters, by marking them as essays. Not any more! Such missives including their digital variations, must be taken seriously, with file copies kept, administrative leaders informed and the authors’ sensitively counselled with parental involvement. More serious deterrents, involving suspension, expulsion, and police intervention should be routine considerations, in the case of student communications that are obscene, perverted, defamatory or criminal in nature.

There have always been some malicious students. The difference today, is that the miscreants are old beyond their years, more techno-wise than their teachers, and compulsively peer-driven.

Teachers can no longer afford to be too trusting. Mud sticks and professional reputations can be destroyed with the laying of criminal charges, arising from a lack of caution. Merely tearing up love letters, or ignoring digital attacks, can now often be career-threatening.

Giving one student a well-meaning generous lift in the car, or allowing one student to stay back putting away the sporting equipment or drama props, or even conducting individual music tuition out of sight behind closed doors – all these can lead to rumour-mongering at least and vindictive allegations of teacher wrong doing at worst.

Today’s teachers ignore the risks of digital attack at their professional peril.