

'Sexting': When a fad is a felony

Marisa Miller, 15, may not look like your typical child pornographer, said Erin Nissley in the Scranton, Pa., *Times-Tribune*, but appearances can deceive. When a "provocative" photo of bra-clad Miller turned up on a male classmate's cell phone, Wyoming County District Attorney George Skumanick threatened her and several other students with child-porn charges. To avoid arrest as a sex offender and possible time in jail, Skumanick said, Miller would have to complete a five-week class on the dangers of pornography and sexual violence. Miller thus became the latest high-schooler to find herself facing criminal charges for "sexting"—a fad in which teens take nude or semi-nude photos on cell phone cameras and send them to friends. But unlike the defendants in previous "sexting" cases, said Sean Hamill in *The New York Times*, Miller is fighting back. With the backing of their parents and the American Civil Liberties Union, Miller and two co-defendants sued Skumanick, claiming he filed the draconian charges in "retaliation" for their refusal to bend to his legal blackmail.

Sorry, but I'm siding with the prosecutor, said Brent Bozell in *Townhall.com*. He doesn't want to put Miller in jail; he's trying to teach her, and her classmates, an important lesson about "a

toxic trend." A recent survey found that one in five teens has sent or posted a nude photo of himself or herself, and nearly a third said they'd received one. These photos often are widely distributed, causing shame and damaged reputations. Last year, an Ohio girl was horrified when a nude photo she'd sent to a boyfriend was distributed to four high schools, and students began calling her "whore." After weeks of this abuse, she hanged herself. "Sexting" is out of control, and "parents and prosecutors alike are correct to put the brakes on this mistake."

Good luck with that, said Nancy Gibbs in *Time*. "Every parent understands that handing over the car keys marks a fateful passage," but cell phones have proved to be just as dangerous—and subversive. Teens already have figured out how to text under desks without looking down, and how to set their phones with ringtones pitched too high for their adult teachers to hear. They use their cells to cheat on tests, order drugs, bully classmates—and send one another nude photos. Unfortunately, parents' and prosecutors are fighting on teens' turf. "They are up in the trees and underground and in caves while we march around in our bright red uniforms, trying to defend their dignity and virtue."