Sexting

**Case Narrative**

Meet Jenny. She’s 13; has plenty of friends and like nearly all 13 year olds in possession of a smartphone which she uses more or less all day long to stay in touch with friends on social media, text, and play games. Jenny is at an age where kids often explore new ideas and push each other to push boundaries. Kids discover their own bodies in the new light of sex education and the flood of sexualized images on tv and the internet. Jenny received a text from Beth showing Beth’s breasts, which were just beginning to fill out. The text read, “let’s see yours!” Jenny blushed, then laughed, then went to the school bathroom, lifted her shirt and took a selfie. Other’s in Jenny’s circle contributed and boundaries were pushed further. A fully nude Jenny pretending to masturbate showed up on a favorite social media site. No one knows who or how it got there. The sexts, even without being posted were nevertheless shared over the internet through SMS and in most cases stored in the “cloud.” All hell broke loose when Jenny’s parents and her school found out about the pics. The police became involved and were contemplating charging Jenny with distributing child pornography.

**Questions**

1. Kids growing up often goof around and end up exposing themselves, perhaps at a slumber party, or summer camp, or wherever. It’s limited to the group and no one thought to take photos, etc. Texting, like all communication online, has the peculiar quality of FEELING private but BEING public. And by being public we now mean being, quite literally, archived forever for anyone with an interest to access. Jenny’s pic is now there for the world to see. By the time it was “removed” from the site it had already metastasized, as it were. Discuss this new situation.
2. What impact do you think sexting has on the psycho-social development of kids who are doing it?
3. What about the police involvement here? Despite the apparent innocence of the play involving these pics, Jenny could well have violated child pornography laws and if prosecuted could find herself convicted of a felony. How are we going to address problems like sexting in the epistemological revolution produced by ICT?