

Jenice Armstrong: Where are the moms?



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YOU PROBABLY get them in your inbox, too.

And if you're like most folks, you laugh and pass these crazy photos on to your friends. I'm talking about those snapshots of high- school students on what's presumably the biggest night of their young lives - prom night - that get passed electronically from person to person.

People snicker at them because the taste involved in the selection of their outfits is - how do I say this? - questionable, at best. Or completely nonexistent. That's because the old "less is more" rule is still in effect, so the photos feature girls in skanky dresses that bare not only their backs, but their midsections and chests, too. And those who don't show everything usually compensate by adding extra tulle, ruffles or whatever. I'll never forget a photo from a few years back that showed a pregnant girl with a cutout showing her exposed belly.

The latest batch of prom photos that I got yesterday from a prom that supposedly took place last month in Newark, N.J., includes a photo of a girl wearing a checkered black-and-white, mermaid-style bra top and long skirt connected by some lacings across her exposed belly, apparently inspired by **Beyonce's** last album cover in which the starlet posed in a similarly styled swimsuit. The pictures, which supposedly were taken last month, have landed on Mediatakeout.com, a catty celebrity gossip site, which juxatopsed the girl's photo with one of the Beyonce inspiration. More than 100 people added comments, mostly negative. Other photos of students presumably taken the same night attracted similar ridicule.

"I think they're deplorable. The bigger concern is that a bunch of parents and

school administrators and chaperones apparently said this was OK," said **Jam Donaldson**, who started hotghettomess.com in 2004 to address just this kind of thing. "As a community, how do we allow this to go on? How do we allow our young women out of the house like this? There are no standard bearers in a community to say this is unacceptable.

"That, to me, is what is scary," added Donaldson, executive producer on a BET show called "We Got to Do Better." "We can all look at them and laugh. But what does it really mean on a larger scale, that that's OK? That as a community we laugh and send the pictures around? I think it's an indication that there's a serious problem in the community with the hypersexualization of young women. Everyone's afraid of saying it. I just don't get it and then when you say it, then you're accused of picking on people."

It's a touchy subject. No one wants to be called elitist. Nor do you want to blame the young women who are demonstrating their creativity by coming up with these outfits. You have to applaud these girls for being brave enough to try not to blend in and for making their own fashion statements on their big nights. The girl who used Beyonce's bathing suit as the inspiration for her prom gown showed a touch of brilliance.

On the other hand, it makes you wonder where the parents are when it comes to deciding what the kids wear on prom night. I still remember picking out a hoochie dress for my own senior prom, way back when. My mother didn't even pause from making dinner when I showed her a picture of what I had in mind. She just paused briefly, vetoed it and went right back to frying burgers. I wound up in a ruffly, pink cotton dress that seemed way too babyish at the time. I'd felt grown and was trying to channel my inner **Diana Ross**, but, luckily, I had my mother to slap some sense into me. Where are these girls' parents? And what about us, those of us who laugh and then pass the photos on to our friends?

"I wish more people, instead of passing them around and laughing, [started] some much-needed conversations that we need to have," Donaldson said. *

Have you peeped a hot trend that hasn't been reported? E-mail heyjen@phillynews.com and let me know what you know.

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