

# AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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## Phone photography

### Cellular phones with built-in cameras are causing privacy concerns

By Liz Doup South  
KRT CAMPUS

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. - Nina Sanchez thought a guy in her class was cute and wanted her cousin to check him out. Small problem: Cousin is in New York. So Sanchez snapped his picture and sent it to her. And it took only a minute or two.

Sanchez, 20, of Pompano Beach, Fla., snapped the guy with a picture phone - a cell phone that captures your image, which can be sent to another picture phone or to a personal computer and spread by the Internet.

This latest techno toy might be taking your picture right now, even if you're sweating at the gym, screaming at your kids or sharing an intimate moment with your lover. These palm-sized phones are so unobtrusive you might not even know you're being photographed. As a result, privacy questions are popping up, especially now, as picture phone prices drop and their popularity soars.

"Like any technology, it can be used appropriately or inappropriately," said David Sobel, general counsel for the Electronic Privacy Information Center in Washington, D.C. "There's a strong potential for abuse, but we'll have to see how people use it before making a blanket judgment on whether this technology is good or bad."

That better not take too long. In the quick-changing techno world, the next new thing is for sale before anyone can say "Cheese!" Just last week, Sprint Corp. announced it was adding a TV service for cell phones with real-time programming. Now that's entertainment. As for that picture phone: It's touted as a potential workhorse.

Imagine real-estate agents zapping photos to busy clients or city inspectors instantly documenting dreary eyesores. Picture store clerks snapping a robbery in progress or victims capturing their assailant - on camera.

The main reason people are grabbing up picture phones is pretty much the same reason they picked up a Polaroid camera nearly a half-century ago: Instant picture, instant gratification.

"It's just fun," says Sanchez, who, incidentally, asked permission to take the young man's photo. "I take pictures of something every day."

But don't think these phones are purely kids' stuff. Some even use them like regular cameras, to capture special people and special moments.

Proud papa Herbert Roach, 29, of Lauderhill, Fla., snaps 9-month-old daughter Halle daily then sends the pictures to family and friends. But he's creative with the camera, too. Early in the football season, Roach, a high school coach, photographed players to pinpoint mistakes.

"A defensive back would say, 'I am on my toes,'" he says.

"And I'd say 'No, you're not.' Then I'd take a picture to show him."

In two important ways, this techie toy differs from many conventional cameras: It's far-reaching and discreet. A picture phone image, available immediately, can be sent anywhere, anytime via e-mail or to another picture phone user. If you're so inclined, you can also print out a clear, clean image.

"Most of us don't walk around with a camera, but we do walk around with a cell phone," says David Bentkowski, an Ohio mayor who recently introduced legislation to ban picture phones in private areas such as bathrooms in Seven Hills, outside Cleveland.

"Suddenly, everybody is exposed to potential paparazzi," he says. "And you don't even know they're taking your picture."

If you don't know anyone with a picture phone now, just wait. For the first time since their commercial introduction four years ago, sales now outpace digital cameras.

Around the world, people snapped up 25 million in the first half of this year - compared to 4 million for the same period last year.

Like many digital gadgets, dropping prices helped fuel the buying spree. The phones once cost about \$400. Some cameras are integrated into the phone; others are attachable.

As with regular wireless phones, users pay a monthly fee for minutes. But they also pay for a visual package. Taking pictures doesn't ring up the bill, sending them does. Some users pay per download, say 40 cents or so per photo.

Another package charges \$15 monthly for sending unlimited pictures. Some cameras make a clicking sound when you shoot, but in a noisy, crowded world that subtle sound is no warning shout. Some are silent, so you only see someone clutching a cell



Akhil Gupta takes a picture of himself wearing a shirt he is considering buying. Cellular phones with picture taking features, such as the one above, are becoming increasingly common and are causing privacy concerns.

MELISSA LYTLE • KRT CAMPUS

phone, a common sight.

As cameras grow more popular here, privacy experts expect to see more problems.

At 31, Kathleen Hishmeh, a Boynton Beach, Fla., accountant and picture phone owner, understands privacy concerns. But she questions trying to regulate them. "You have cameras so small that people don't notice them either," she says. "Anybody can use those. So how can you regulate the phones?"

Even Bentkowski came to the same conclusion. The city council tabled his legislation but as the town's newly elected mayor, he'll see that warning signs are posted in public buildings: Please, be aware of camera phones.

At least one private company has gone further. All phones - regular cell and picture phones - are banned everywhere but the lobby at The Sports Club/LA, an upscale gym with celebrity clients in New York, Los Angeles and other cities. But for many young fans, privacy problems can't trump the phone's fun factor. Raised on reality TV, school surveillance cameras and dorm video cams, the picture phone doesn't seem invasive to them.

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