

I'll show you mine

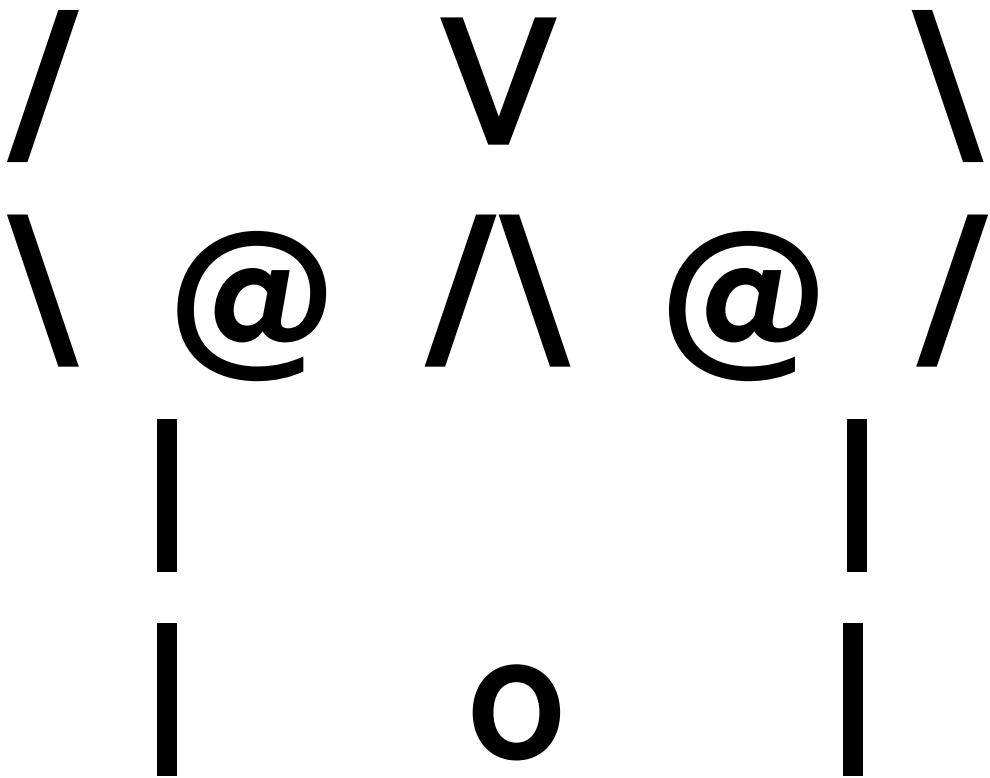


*The ups and downs
of adult sexting*





if you show me yours



By Christina Patterson



“I’ve got my football teammate’s wife to send a picture, and he could find out by looking at the phone. That made it more exciting for me”

I

have never sent a “sext”. I have, it’s true, done a bit of internet dating, but the photos I have posted have tended to be of my face. I have never fought the temptation to whip out a smartphone, stick it down my knickers and snap. I have also never thought that what I needed to cheer me up on a winter’s night was the sudden appearance on my phone of a stranger’s penis. But I’m beginning to think that the fact I haven’t done these things marks me out as a member of a prehistoric species. I am beginning to feel, in fact, like the Pope on Twitter.

The Pope might well prefer the traditional meaning of the word “sext”, which the OED defines as: “A service forming part of the Divine Office of the Western Christian Church, traditionally said (or chanted) at the sixth hour of the day.” This, I think it’s fair to say, is not the meaning Ashley Cole attached to the photos he sent and received that cost him his high-profile marriage. It’s also not the meaning the MP Brooks Newmark attached to the photos he sent a pretty young Tory activist on Twitter. The pretty young activist turned

out, unfortunately, to be a burly male hack. Newmark, 56, resigned from his post as minister for civil society in October, but only after the Sun on Sunday “uncovered a new shame”. Newmark, it claimed, had also sent about 40 naked “selfies” to a young single mum. The ones that were published showed Newmark looking plump and hairy in a hotel bathroom. They were, thank goodness, carefully cropped.

Almost every week, there seems to be a new survey claiming that teenagers Snapchat their genitals as casually as they comb their hair. But clearly, it isn’t just young people who are tapping away at their smartphones with their clothes off. According to a McAfee study last year, 54% of American adults have used their smartphones to send or receive “intimate content”.

Paul, 36, is a professional footballer. He wouldn’t let me meet him, but he agreed to speak to me on the phone. If you don’t believe that footballers are ever role models, then you really must talk to Paul. He played for a big London club and earned £75,000 a week. He had the big house outside London. He had the clothes and watches and shoes. He also had the dolly bird wife. But then he realised that wasn’t enough. “When I heard about Ashley Cole’s sexting,” he told me, “I thought: you know what, I’ll go down the same route as him and not get caught. Obviously,” he added, “I was sexting my wife quite a lot and I had a few nights out with a few players. Their wives came out with us, and I’m quite a friendly

person. I got their numbers and started sexting them, and got a few pictures, and whatnot.”

Uh-uh. And how *exactly*, I asked, sounding like Miss Marple, do you get your teammates’ wives to send you pictures of their pubes?

“It was on a night out and it would be, ‘How’s your sex life,’ and all this stuff, and they’d, like, go, ‘It’s a bit iffy’, because as a footballer you can’t have as much sex as you’d have in a normal job because you’ve got quite strict rules. So I’d be sending dirty texts saying ‘I bet you wish you had this done to you.’”

As you do. And who would send the first explicit picture? “I would, and they’d send messages back.” And did all the women like the photos? “All but one. The one who didn’t told her husband, and that’s how the word got round.”

Paul lost his job, his marriage, his reputation and his home. He now plays for a much lower league club, for a lot less money, up north. Why did he do it? “[At the time] I felt quite pleased with myself because I thought: you know what, I’ve managed to get my own teammate’s wife to send a picture, and they could find out by looking at the phone. That made it more exciting for me. There’s always the moment you could get caught out. You’ve got to be on your toes.”

Steve Pope is a psychotherapist who works mostly with addicts. That, he explained, can be “sex, drugs, drink or food”. And the sex element, he added, nearly always involves a smartphone. He has agreed to meet

“Ridiculous bulge in my shorts now. wanna see?”
One of the tamer messages US mayoral contender Anthony Weiner sends a Las Vegas croupier, Lisa Weiss, in 2011



“Thinking of you, and yes very very horny today!!! Big kiss xx”
Shane Warne tweets a married woman, Adele Angeleri, behind Liz Hurley’s back in 2010. Hurley leaves him in 2013



“I only rap reality!”
Kanye West admits in 2010 that a picture purporting to be of his penis — which he allegedly sent to various women on MySpace, and which emerged online — is indeed his



Fancy a quick



me and introduce me to some of his clients

Pope used to be a lawyer. He used, in fact, to “look after” criminal gangs such as the Krays. Born in Blackpool, but brought up in the East End of London, he was the son of an alcoholic. He himself became a workaholic, but when the “buzz” of the law started fading, he turned to cocaine. By 40, he was bankrupt. He had lost his job, his marriage and his career. “I was homeless and penniless,” he told me, when he picked me up from a freezing station a few miles from Blackpool, “I was thinking, ‘If I’ve got any talent, it’s empathy.’” So he trained as a psychotherapist. Now he rents a huge house, on the site of an old hall where “mad king” George III used to meet his mistress. It was here I met Clive.

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live is not, of course, his real name. I’d better not describe him in too much detail, except to say that he’s handsome and what used to be called “dapper”. Clive is 68. A semi-retired businessman, he has, he told me over a cup of tea in Pope’s vast sitting room, been a sex

addict since becoming a lifeguard in Blackpool in the 1960s. “We had our choice,” he said, just a little bit proudly, “on a daily basis.” When he got married in his early twenties, he tried at first to be faithful, but his ex-wife “was a cold woman” and “the inevitable happened”. When the internet came along, he would “go onto the porn channels”, but “it was starting to get silly”. “I downloaded a few short movies,” he said, “you know, the MILF ones.” The what ones? “You know. The Mothers I’d Like To...” Ah yes, I said crisply. I see.

And when did the sexting start? Clive cleared his throat and, for the first time, looked a bit embarrassed. “Well,” he said. “People send me texts and email messages.” Through dating sites? “People I’ve met,” he says. “I’ve never,” he added, as if this would be the ultimate humiliation, “been on a dating website. The way I’ve met my ladies has been sheer chance. I met one through playing online poker. I have a girlfriend I see twice a week. I’ve a lady down south I met 12, 13 years ago. I’ve another one up north.” I nodded matter-of-factly, as you would if you had “gentlemen” scattered round the country. Which, by the way, I don’t.

“I took some photos by request for a couple of my ladies who wanted them,” he said, “but I emailed them. I didn’t send them by phone. They sent photographs of themselves, and let me take photographs of them.” Nude photographs? “Oh, yes!” Was he ever worried about security? “No, because

there’s trust.” And has he been happy to send intimate photos of himself? “They’re not willy shots,” he said, sounding a little bit hurt. “They’re full-body shots. It’s a turn-on to send full-body pictures. I try and pose them, so they’re not too raunchy. I feel so lucky, I really do! I’ve got all this technology at my disposal.”

It all seemed, I told Steve Pope afterwards, quite sweet. Clive, I said, seemed to have it all under control. Pope shook his head. “We did a test with him on Friday,” he said. “Picture exchange is one of his major compulsions. With the sexting and texting, people feel valued if somebody appreciates their picture. If they sext somebody, for a minute they’ll be OK. Five minutes later, they’re shaking, because they start to think, ‘Why has nothing come back?’”

It certainly seems to have been “a major compulsion” for another of Pope’s clients — Jack, as I’ll call him. A slight, shy-looking man, Jack was surprisingly open about his habits. “It began,” he said, “with sex.” Real sex. The kind you have when you go to a nightclub and come home with a real, live girl. Now 35, Jack was 27 when his focus shifted to the digital world. “With the phones becoming a bit more advanced,” he said, “there were girls on there, and instead of going out to meet them, I’d end up just texting them instead.” He had, he explained, an app on his phone called Snavsave which saves the pictures people send on Snapchat. Snapchat is one of the preferred platforms for sexters, because it automatically deletes ➤➤➤

“Send me something very naughty”

The 31-month affair between Tiger Woods and cocktail waitress Jamiee Grubbs was documented in a string of texts that emerged in 2009



“I’ll send you something in return — that way we each have a secret”

The MP Brooks Newmark sexts a pretty, young Tory activist online... who turns out to be a burly, male reporter. He won’t be standing for re-election in May

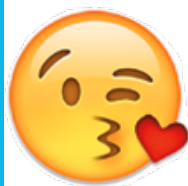


“Please delete all texts ill have no balls left”

A desperate Ashley Cole tries to save his marriage in 2008 in texts to an anonymous lover to whom he sent lewd pictures of himself



Whatever happened to



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photographs after a short period of time, meaning no permanent record of the picture is supposed to exist.

Does he remember his first experience of sending pictures? Jack stared out of the window. "I was in bed," he said, "and I'd take a picture with my top off, and the girl would be saying, 'Go down a bit further.'" A girl he'd met in real life or online? "Online," he said. "Through Snapchat and Facebook and whatnot. So I've gone a bit further down, and then I'd say, 'Your turn now,' and it's gone on like that." Soon, he stopped going out. "I thought: this is more of a thrill for me. I'm not having to travel anywhere. I'm seeing the goods, so why I am I wasting my time going out?"

Indeed. Why bother to buy a girl a drink, when you can see "the goods" for free? It didn't, I told him carefully, sound all that romantic. Jack looked surprised. "The romantic side didn't really bother me," he said. "It was the excitement and the intensity of the situation, the thrill that was going through me." Was it satisfying? "Well, yes," he said, "because you don't feel humiliated on Snapchat, and when you're receiving these pictures, you're like: 'You know what, I must be alright, because they're trusting me to send a picture.'" Even though he had Snapsave, and their trust was misplaced? For the first time, Jack looked sheepish. "I know," he said, "it was a trick of words."

When he lost his job, Jack started spending all day on his computer. He even used to sneak downstairs to spend time on it

when his girlfriend had gone to bed. When she discovered his stash of online pictures, he lost her, too. Now, he says, he "speaks to one or two girls in a dirty way," but he doesn't send them pictures. Pope even checks his phone. So why did he agree to speak to me? Now Jack looks sad. "It's just to get the word out to warn people: look, it can become a problem, it can become serious. It causes a lot of pain. You're just going to get a bad name for yourself, and it will be all over Facebook, etc, which you don't want."

I still didn't really understand why you'd risk so much for a brief thrill. So I decided to ask an expert. Susie Orbach is one of the world's leading psychoanalysts and social critics. I first met her when I was chairing a panel on her book *The Impossibility of Sex*. She has written widely on our relationship with our bodies, and this certainly seems to herald a new relationship with our bodies.

"What we're talking about," she said, when I visited her flat just round the corner from the Freud museum in north London, "is a new phenomenon entirely." So what did she think about Brooks Newmark? Why would a middle-aged man who apparently had it all — the big job, the big house, the money, the wife, the family — wreck it all by sticking his penis on Twitter? And particularly when he didn't grow up in a generation that expected women to find that a treat?

Orbach nodded as she sipped her tea. "It's really interesting," she said, "that what these guys think they've got going for them is their

member, when actually what's dazzling is their access to power. It's got something to do with being swept up in the image they imagine the other has of them. They find that intoxicating. Maybe it's masculinity now wanting to do what's equivalent to what's seen all over, which is the hypersexualisation of females." In the digital world, she said, "the self is a form of presentation." These days, "you construct yourself. You commodify yourself to a certain extent. You then engage from that position."

I think all of that is probably true, but I still don't understand why the sudden arrival of a "dick pic" in a woman's message box might seem like a promising start to a romance. Where's the charm? Where's the subtlety? Where's the erotic? My women friends, as far as I can tell, don't spend their time at bus stops combing their inbox for penises. Or maybe they do and don't tell me?

"Many young men sent me pictures of their genitals," said a fiftysomething friend of a friend who agreed to talk to me. When her marriage broke up, she decided to date some younger men. Much, much younger men. And her experience of younger men was that this was a normal part of the courtship ritual. Did the men ask for photos in return? "They did," said the woman I'll call Karen. "And," she added, just a little bit stiffly, "I did not oblige."

So what was her response when she first got them? The expression on her face made it clear. "Is 'disgust' the right word? I don't like looking at pictures of penises. I like men.

"Is 'disgust' the right word? I don't like looking at pictures of penises. I like men. I'm interested in their face and their body"

“I was in bed and I’d take a picture with my top off, and the girl would be saying, ‘Go down a bit further’. And then I’d say, ‘Your turn now’”

I’m interested in their face and their body and their personality. I don’t want to see these pictures.”

A

few weeks later, at an event on “women in leadership”, I met a senior executive I’ll call Anna. She’s very beautiful, and she’s 41. She first started getting “dick pics”, she told me over a glass of wine, about six or seven years ago, from men her own age she had already met. I asked her how she reacted. “Well,” she said, “it made me uncomfortable. Something so explicit, so impersonal, on a phone. I’m also uncomfortable because of the security of it all.” What was her response — what, in fact, is the etiquette? “In some cases,” she said, “there would be silence. What does one say to this? ‘Oh, I didn’t expect this!’”

So, it wasn’t a turn-on? “For me,” she said, “it’s really not.” And did they expect her to send sexually explicit images back? A long pause. “Yes.” And did she? Another long pause. “With one person I did, and I regret it.” Did she send them on WhatsApp? “Yes.” Do

the photos disappear, as they do on Snapchat? “Er, no. I tried to delete them from the conversation, but I thought afterwards, ‘Why the f*** did you do that?’ Sorry,” she said, but by now we were both giggling so much it was quite hard to transcribe the tape. “Excuse my language. What the f*** was I thinking?”

“We have,” says the psychotherapist Robert Weiss, “a whole new wave of problems because of the immediacy of the pleasure. It’s just so easy to find and get to, and it’s changing our culture.” Weiss is one of the world’s experts on digital sexual behaviour. His new book, *Always Turned On: Facing Sex Addiction in the Digital Age*, is published this week. It was my good luck that he was in London while I was researching this piece. Unfortunately, when I went to a hotel in Earls Court to interview him, nobody at reception seemed to have heard of him. “I’m here for the seminar on sex addiction,” I explained, and when everyone in reception turned round to look at me, I had a tiny taste of the sex addict’s shame.

When Weiss, who still calls himself a sex addict, started working in the field, the internet hadn’t been invented. The people he worked with would run up huge bills on phone sex and have “closets full of porn”. Now, he explained when I finally found him, the internet offers “accessibility, affordability and anonymity” and this makes internet porn “a much more powerful package”.

In spite of the fact that he works with so many people with so many problems, he’s surprisingly upbeat about the cultural shift.

“You have to get beyond the shock of, ‘Oh, my God, look what our kids are doing,’” he said, “forgetting that that’s what our parents said to us.” That’s certainly true, but doesn’t he think this has implications for people’s ability to sustain intimate, real-life relationships? “I just wrote a book about this,” he said. “I would not be surprised if we’re evolving to be a less intimate culture. Maybe it won’t matter if some people struggle with intimacy and connection, because they’ll have robotic devices to meet their needs.”

Robotic devices? Right. Well, it certainly sounds a lot less hassle than trying to have a relationship with a human being. But isn’t there something missing? I don’t, I told him, want to feel like a Victorian governess trying to cover up a piano leg, but I can’t help agreeing with Steve Pope that the digital sexual world seems to be “a wild horse running unbridled”.

“What all this is going to mean in 20 years from now,” said Weiss, “we have no idea. We are in an evolutionary phase. Some of us will survive and thrive in this new environment we’ve created and some of us won’t. It is,” he said, and I thought of my giggles with Anna and my sadness with Jack, “the greatest social experiment we have ever experienced.” ■

Digital

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It’s over!!!

