

My Adventure as a Sext Researcher

Leanna Wolfe, Ph.D.

It all began rather innocently. I'd placed an Internet personals ad, tagging myself as a "Slightly Wild Deep Thinker in Search of a Hug." Responses flew in by the minute ranging from twenty-somethings who included photos of their genitalia to middle-aged attorneys who sought action while on business in Los Angeles. Attempting to avoid diving into the wrong relationship too fast, I forced myself to meet ten of my respondents.

Two were uncomfortably overweight; one was married, several felt too young, and four lacked chemistry. Then there was Derek. Derek introduced himself as having a good career, an athletic body and that he who enjoyed both indoor and outdoor activities. His picture matched his personal description and I felt game.

Being that my self-description alluded to having been around the world (and around the block) many times, I sensed we were on the same page regarding sex and relationships. We then exchanged phone numbers and talked. He sounded good...and I proposed we find a time to meet. By LA standards we were GU (Geographically Undesirable). Derek lived in the far reaches of Malibu and I lived in overly sunny Van Nuys. In the middle of the night, we were 50 minutes away, while in the thick of rush hour it could easily take two hours.

The next morning a text arrived on my new smart phone which read, "Hi this is Derek. Good Morning, Have a Great Day!" Then later in the afternoon while attending a rather boring conference, Derek sent a second text, checking in on me. He bantered how with my being so brainy it would take a lot to keep me entertained. I wondered, how did he figure out that I'm smart? Hmmm. I wasn't sure, but that all-knowing tease sound of his commentary felt like fun. Around eleven that night I heard from him again as he texted me, "Sweet Dreams."

While I'd known about texting ever since my teen daughter required a texting plan to function socially with her friends back in the year 2000, it wasn't yet an adult practice. Eventually (with my old dumb phone) I would exchange brief texts regarding addresses and arrival times. Then, texting required pushing the number keys one-to-three times to access each letter of the alphabet; it was such a chore that I did my best to avoid impassioned discussions.

Around the time Anthony Weiner mistakenly tweeted (rather than privately texted) a for-someone-else's-eyes only crotch photo, I'd acquired a smart phone. I was super-wary when John, a guy whom I'd met for dinner and wet-kissed in the parking lot attempted to cajole me into sending him a pic of my nipples. I was horrified. While I might not have designs on running for elected office, the very very last thing I would do would be to satisfy that request. John's rationale was that he wasn't sure my nipples were the shape and length he liked. The exchange reeked of a body-parts fetish and I did my best to make him go away including allowing my then current boyfriend to text him anything he wanted to with my phone.

Now the connection with Derek began differently. He didn't request inappropriate photos; he presented himself as a caring friend. And certainly when his texted greetings were the first things I read in the morning and the last things I read before going to bed at night, he was on the road to getting under my skin. Then one night he sent me a picture of himself bed bathed in the golden light of a reading lamp wishing me, "Sweet Dreams." I became intoxicated...he looked so delectable. I so wanted to climb in next to him despite that we were GU. I began requesting that we find a time to meet. He said he'd be traveling inland for business and we could then find a rendezvous spot. Sadly the hour he could meet conflicted with a dear friend's not-to-be-missed art opening. Frustrated, I boldly proposed I meet him at the bar of the hotel he would be staying at. My proposal began to sound scary even to adventurous me. Could I drive a half hour into an unknown town at eleven at night to meet a stranger for a drink? My frightened lizard-brain took over, making me so exhausted I couldn't dream of getting into my car and thus the in-person Derek remained a mystery.

The texting continued as Derek travelled overseas for business, attaching pretty photos from his trip. The moment he returned stateside, I found myself desperate for an in-person meeting. I called to welcome him home and he sounded irritated. He felt tired and wanted to focus on unpacking. The meta-message I received? Texting was fine, but don't dare invade here-and-now space with a phone call! I tried to let this culture of texting sink in, satisfying myself with his irate explanatory text which was soon followed by a more apologetic one.

I noted that despite my efforts to meet ten of my ad respondents, Derek was the only one I was still in touch with. Moreover, we had not met. I had no idea how he moved, what he smelled like, if he had a pleasing touch or could even make me laugh. That Tuesday his hyper-busyness shifted and he invited me to meet him for lunch. All of my girl friends who offer free dating advice were beyond disapproving when I announced that I would be driving seventy-five minutes through a bit of traffic to meet my texting friend.

When I first saw him, a pale of relief lifted as I noted that he was even cuter than his photos and that unlike ninety percent of the guys I'd been out with, he was actually interested in what I had to say. (Most of my blind-date meetings involved me pumping the guy with questions and he barely being able to carry on back and forth banter.)

We snuggled our seats close to each other and he playfully touched my hands and arms. We giggled over anything and everything. Then an unconscious game of footsie began and I knew that the seventy-five-minute drive was absolutely worth it.

On the way home, a new text twinkled in. Derek was thanking me for making the long-drive and expressing his delight in meeting me. I texted back that I felt fortunate that amidst this vast sea of Southern California freeways we'd found what appeared to be a sweet patch of synergy.

Having met in person and sensing a sincere attraction, something shifted in me and I began to feel brave enough to sext. I began shyly asking him how he liked to kiss. He offered, "Open mouth, gazing, gentle breathing, full and

exploratory.” A wriggle spurted up my spine. I confirmed a big, “Yes!!” Thus began a grand conversation of what each of us like... ..A slow seduction...A bit of butt slapping...Loud moans... sleeping close. In every idle moment I fantasized about consummating that kiss.

On his birthday morning he texted that he would like to unwrap me slowly for his present. Excited, I offered to oblige and the next evening he invited me to his house. Again it was one of those meetings my prissy girl friends would never approve of. I set my GPS for Malibu at eight that evening and slid onto his street just after nine. I felt slightly like a tarty call girl when I gave my name to the attendant at the guard shack, wondering how often the likes of Derek hosts late night visitors. While I wasn't exactly dressed as a call girl, I did wear black yoga tights, a flowy top from India and a combination of playful necklaces.

Nervous I stepped into his house with the picture window view of the Pacific Ocean. We made tea. Derek lit candles, put on a romantic music track and delivered that much awaited kiss. Perfect. We never got around to drinking the tea... Soon enough he'd eased off the tights, the top and the bra. His fingers found their way into the deep pleasure zones of my vulva. Would my prissy girlfriends approve? Probably not. Did I care? Not at all. I needed this. All of this.

Many orgasms later, we snuggled tight in his bed. I curled into a ball and he gently spooned me. I felt small and a little uncertain. He snored quietly and kept holding me tight. A couple of hours later, a morning alarm blared us awake and the next thing I knew we were showering and soaping each other's sleepy yet perfect bodies. He'd gathered my clothes in a pile and I dutifully put them on and negotiated the long drive back to the valley. I arrived home to find a text proclaiming the visit had put a big smile on his face.

While I somehow believed he would be up for getting together soon, no invitations arrived. Maybe my prissy girlfriends were right. Maybe I was behaving more like a slutty girl than a potential girlfriend. While I had forced myself to meet ten of my respondents, once again I'd got myself into a wanting romantic hole.

Thus my texting (and sexting) addiction began. I wanted confirmation that Derek was still paying attention to me. I noted that when I'd ask him questions that involved contemplation, e.g. "Do you believe in God?" he was a bit slow on the uptake. But when I asked him whether he might like to try a threesome the return text would come through lightning fast. Of course he would and who did I have in mind to join us? I sensed that my role in his life was becoming fantasy sex-babe. I acquiesced for a while. Pretty much anything wildly erotic that I proposed, he'd claim full interest. When I attempted to incorporate food into the discussion by introducing the concept of "mouth feel" explaining how I delighted in the creaminess of tiramisu, the banter quickly migrated to the ways he'd like to deliver and receive oral pleasuring.

Meanwhile I was seriously suffering from a sexting jones. Whenever the little green message square would appear on my phone, a shot of dopamine would instantaneously course through my body. I began to harangue myself with negative judgments. Why had I accepted such a connection? Didn't I want a full-on boyfriend to go to concerts, art openings and nice dinners? What was going on inside of me that made this rarified connection so compelling? Desperate, I decided the only "healthy" thing to do was to end the relationship. I texted him that if he couldn't make time for an in-person "us" then I would have to move on. He then agreed to stop sending me suggestive texts if he couldn't deliver on them; in fact he agreed to stop texting altogether. For a moment I felt convinced I was on the path to relationship mental health and then a grand dopamine crash ensued. While driving, I found myself screaming and crying in utter pain. The attention I'd been receiving from those teasing texts really mattered to me. I began texting about my brain crash and Derek responded. I implored him not to, telling him I had to finish my letting go process.

By the next morning I faced that I was in no condition to let go of any of this. I needed to receive Derek's "Good Morning Sexy" texts. I needed to check in with him even if he didn't respond to anything but my playful teases. I was writing five times more texts than he was, trying to cram all matter of reflection into the space of a 50-character text. I believed that in playing the role of the

sexy tart, rather than a full-on girlfriend, I was not allowed to place phone calls, skype or write long-form emails.

I began to wonder whether our intimate text style was “normal.” To gain perspective I began inviting new guys I met to text me as well. Most of them also offered short responses; I found that my long-winded style was pretty unusual. The moment an exchange got complicated; one of them immediately picked up the phone and called. Another ducked out when I outsmarted him regarding the mixed messages in his behavior. Despite it all, Derek had staying power. No matter what emotional-brain dump imploded from my smart phone over to his, he eventually responded. Sometimes the response would be incredibly terse like “silver lining,” but nonetheless I felt heard and emotionally that mattered very much.

Running out of erotic topics to discuss I began to send photos of myself. It started rather innocently... I texted that I was skinny dipping at a high Sierra lake and he responded that he would love to “see” me. I found an obliging woman and handed her my smart phone, directing her to capture no more than a suggestion that I was in fact nude. She captured me beaming with only a slight glimmer of my floating white breasts. The perfect shots delighted Derek. My mood transformed from bored and disconnected to totally on fire.

Next I was going to a sensual party wherein I would wear a flimsy lavender dress. First I sent him the photo of the dress. He quickly confirmed that it looked very hot. Later at the party I asked a friend to photograph my breasts just slightly peering out of the half-buttoned bodice. As the shutter clicked, I thought about Derek nibbling at my nipples... The photos were exquisite...and of course I texted several to him. I noted that something was shifting in me, I was no longer the strident feminist professor, but I was engaging my inner babe. While in the past I'd had boyfriends who wanted me to wear certain things or who commented disapprovingly of the things I chose to wear, Derek was wide-open appreciative. He never requested certain images, but rather playfully responded with comments like “Mmmmm...you are so sexy!”

The door stayed open as I commissioned girlfriends to photograph me in my underwear and sporting a hot new bikini. I almost did a double-take on myself who had been wearing basic one-piece speedos over the previous 15 years to suddenly decide that her body was hot enough for a bikini. The bikini shots turned out perfect and as expected Derek devoured them as well. For a while seeing him in person became incidental to photographing myself for his consumption and those payoff dopamine-producing sexy texts.

I mentioned my obsession with sexting to a girlfriend who offered me some images and provocative promises she'd downloaded from a sexting site. I looked them over and told her, "Absolutely no." They were so impersonal...and moreover they were filled with typos and misspellings! I sensed that I was on a personal journey to uncover and discover my hidden erotic self... nothing canned or pre-made would do.

Meanwhile, Derek did his best to keep up with me. Clearly not having a bevy of guy friends who would photograph him in suggestive poses, he simply photographed himself wearing underwear or low cut jeans with a big smile on. His happy look carried a contagious glow.

I was starting to get the allure of sexting. We were generating our own very personal pornography. We were both the directors and the stars. And each transmission totally rocked my dopamine receptors. In idle moments I'd scan the last week's series of sexy texts hovering over the images and adoring commentary.

One afternoon I was wearing just a turquoise print sarong and noticed how one of my pretty nipples was peering through. I sensed that I was no longer just thinking of my body as something I inhabit, but also something that is hot in its own right. No one was around and I skillfully photographed just that nipple peeking out. The image was perfect and I immediately sent it to Derek. Within seconds he devoured it with a series of hot adoring comments. I was slightly scared that I had crossed the Anthony Weiner line in that I had sexted a real body part.

In a quick web search on sexting, I noted that few sexted images stay just in the phone of the beholder. With the ease in which they are sent, they are readily forwarded to interested friends. Fearing the consequences of my nipple going viral, I implored Derek to keep that image “just between us.” He assured me that he would.

Eventually Derek did invite me over for another delightful late-night visit. This time he gifted me a playful necklace he’d picked up on a recent business trip and we sat out on a deck overlooking the Pacific Ocean. He wrapped me in a fur blanket and we talked over what all that texting and sexting had been about.

Out of that conversation I faced that I was the one who had made up the restrictions wherein I was a lowly tart who was relegated to the small screen of her smart phone to attempt to express her feelings. He gladly offered me his email address and encouraged me to call anytime I wanted to. Quietly I considered that I had limited myself to texting for my own reasons... to fully experience and to better research intimate texting and sexting!

After that I felt my sexting research was complete. I’d generated a serious dopamine addiction to receiving commentary on my self-commissioned images, developed a new-found appreciation for both the hotness of my ever-aging body, and for the pleasures of starring in and consuming a co-created personal pornography.