

# Erotica: phone sex

SUSAN M. BLOCK

The Dr. Susan Block Institute for the Erotic Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, California, United States

Phone sex is a virtual sexual activity involving erotic or explicit conversation between two or more people by telephone, usually while one or more of the participants are masturbating. Unlike an obscene phone call, which is an unsolicited, nonconsensual act, “phone sex” is consensual. People have phone sex in the context of a personal relationship, as a commercial transaction between a paying client and a paid professional phone sex operator (PSO), or a combination of these.

There are many varieties of “phone sex,” including mutual self-pleasuring with sexual sounds, guided masturbation, fantasy role-play, erotic storytelling, sexual confessions, recalling sexual memories, dirty talk, sexual psychodrama, erotic hypnosis, phone domination, pornographic discussion, shared intimacies, fetish-focused conversation, phone sex therapy, phone sex-life coaching, and others. Although masturbation commonly accompanies all phone sex forms, it is not required. For instance, some people have phone sex while driving and unable to touch themselves. Others might indulge in a fetish such as cross-dressing which may not involve masturbation. But self-pleasure, at least at one end of the phone, is usually involved. Essentially, telephonic conversation with masturbation equals phone sex.

Most phone sex conversation revolves around mainstream sexual experiences, including sexual intercourse in different positions, oral sex, breast play, or a back and forth, descriptive discussion of the real-life masturbatory activities in which both participants are engaged as they have phone sex. But many phone sex conversations, especially through professional services, involve taboo topics such as incest fantasies, anal sex, cuckolding, interracial, bisexuality, BDSM, age play, rape fantasies, orgies, sexual harassment, exhibitionism, voyeurism, animal sex, and many more. This kind of forbidden phone talk provides a

semi-anonymous outlet for socially unacceptable or unconventional desires that participants cannot or will not fulfill in real life. This may be due to moral considerations, legal consequences, psychological inhibition, physical disability, bodily dangers, the reluctance or refusal of a regular partner, or fear of social stigma.

## The history of phone sex

There does not appear to have been a moment when phone sex was “invented.” Throughout history, technological advances have had direct, if unpredictable effects on human sexuality. This is certainly true of the telephone. People may have been having some kind of phone sex since Alexander Graham Bell first invented the instrument. The use of party lines in the early decades of the twentieth century, foreshadowing modern chat lines, were often opportunities for erotic, though rarely explicit communication. No one knows how many early party line callers were secretly masturbating as they interacted with the operator and their neighbors, though lack of privacy precluded the auditory intimacy that pure phone sex entails.

Soon after the private phone became a household item in the 1950s, paramours started using it to exchange words and sounds of passion. Until then, most people had to be in bed *together* to converse about sex or to talk erotically. Thus, the private telephone was a revolutionary instrument. It made it possible for people to relax in different beds, possibly in different cities, completely separated, yet feeling close, making “sounds of sex,” and essentially engaging in what we now call “phone sex.” Phone sex grew in popularity through the second half of the twentieth century, especially as commercial phone sex services began to spring up in the 1970s to provide an outlet for people (mostly men) with a compelling need to talk with skilled sexual conversationalists (mostly women). In the 1980s, 976 and 900 numbers proliferated. Phone company regulation caused many of these businesses to collapse, though some adapted their billing methods.

## The popularity of modern phone sex

Most modern phone sex is between loved ones. Phone sex is the X-rated version of the old AT&T dream, allowing participants to “reach out and touch someone” as they touch themselves. According to a survey by Internet phone company Vonage Canada and Decima Research, 53 percent of men and women have engaged in phone sex with a close friend or partner. Phone sex helps many modern couples who live in different cities to keep long-distance love alive. More than 75 percent of the people in the Vonage/Decima survey consider phone sex to be “very” or “somewhat” important in a long-distance relationship (Vonage Canada 2005).

But some lovers engage in phone sex even when living close by. The verbal nature of phone sex is part of the appeal. It has long been recognized that an important aspect of good sex is verbal communication, yet many people find it difficult or awkward to talk about their sexual feelings and fantasies with their lovers during sex or in any face-to-face encounter. Fear of this kind of intimacy is closely linked to fear of rejection. Often, the phone sex participant does not feel as vulnerable and is therefore free to communicate without fear. In this sense, the phone can act as a confessional.

In the twenty-first century, with the advent of the Internet, commercial phone sex services, including smaller companies and independent providers, have multiplied. Despite the availability of cybersex, webcam, and sexting, commercial and non-commercial phone sex is more popular than ever. There are various reasons for this, not least of which is that phone sex offers a level of auditory and verbal intimacy, convenience, and virtual anonymity that is somehow different from other media or “real life.”

Physically, phone sex feels and is relatively safe. With no bodily contact, there is no exchange of body fluids, no risk of transmission of disease or impregnation. These are major reasons why many conscientious individuals choose to use the phone if they are going to have sex with a stranger. Furthermore, the phone is a stage on which to act out wild fantasies, a telephonic erotic “theatre of the mind” that allows participants to explore in safety taboo desires which, if actualized, may be lethal, illegal, or at least dangerous. Playing out

forbidden fantasies on the phone can be deeply satisfying, with no harm done to the participants or innocent bystanders. If one is having phone sex with a professional or other trusted outsider, one can explore secret fantasies without exposure to negative judgments from loved ones or anyone in everyday life.

Phone sex can also enhance personal physical sexual knowledge and technique, as one can explore the body at one’s own pace accompanied by a lover’s erotic presence on the phone, but without the sexual pressure that may accompany an in-person encounter. Practicing sexual exercises such as kegels (pelvic floor-strengthening squeezes) or the stop–start technique can be easier during phone sex.

## Phone sex problems

There remains a social stigma attached to phone sex, especially to using commercial phone sex services. This deters some, but heightens the taboo appeal for many phone sex lovers. Some people enjoy phone sex so much that they find it difficult to control its use. Although there is no clinical classification for “phone sex addiction,” many phone sex users who have difficulties controlling their habits call themselves “phone sex addicts.” Conversely, people who “fall in love” during phone sex before meeting are often disappointed when taking their phone sex relationship into reality if they have no physical chemistry with the other.

When married people have phone sex with others, are they cheating? That depends on how the couple defines “cheating.” Some people consider phone sex to be infidelity, others do not, while still others put it in a “gray area.” Often, the deciding factor is whether phone sex activities are concealed from the partner. Just as phone sex brings some closer together, it drives others apart, especially if one partner is having a phone sex affair or using commercial phone sex lines secretly or frequently. A phone sex affair may not involve any physical touching at all, but the intense erotic intimacy can threaten real-life relationships. Using commercial phone sex lines may be less likely to create emotional entanglements than engaging in a phone sex affair, but the cost of calling these services can mount rapidly, causing as

much damage to a phone sex user's life as a weakness for gambling or other expensive hobbies.

## Phone sex intelligence

Phone sex favors intelligence, imagination, compassion, creativity, and the ability to listen rather than physical attributes. According to the Vonage/Decima survey, when asked what is most important to a successful phone sex call, most people (39 percent) surveyed said "imagination," followed by "receptiveness" and "creativity" (31 and 30 percent respectively).

Talking about sex tends to increase sexual intelligence. The "conversation" part of the phone sex equation can be a lesson in the infinite articulations of human eroticism, opening up the erotic imagination. Partial sense deprivation has been shown to enhance the senses that are not deprived. Pure phone sex deprives the senses of sight, touch, smell, and taste, thereby heightening the sense of sound, amplifying one's ability to listen and articulate desire. In a sense, modern phone

sex lovers are helping to create a new, more expressive language of love and lust, mood and sensuality, power and surrender, freedom and restraint, screams and moans, romantic poetry and dirty talk which did not exist before the invention of the telephone.

**SEE ALSO:** Adultery and Fidelity; Arousal, Sexual; Consensual Sex; Fantasy, Sexual; Fetish; Masturbation; Safer Sex

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## REFERENCE

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## FURTHER READINGS

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