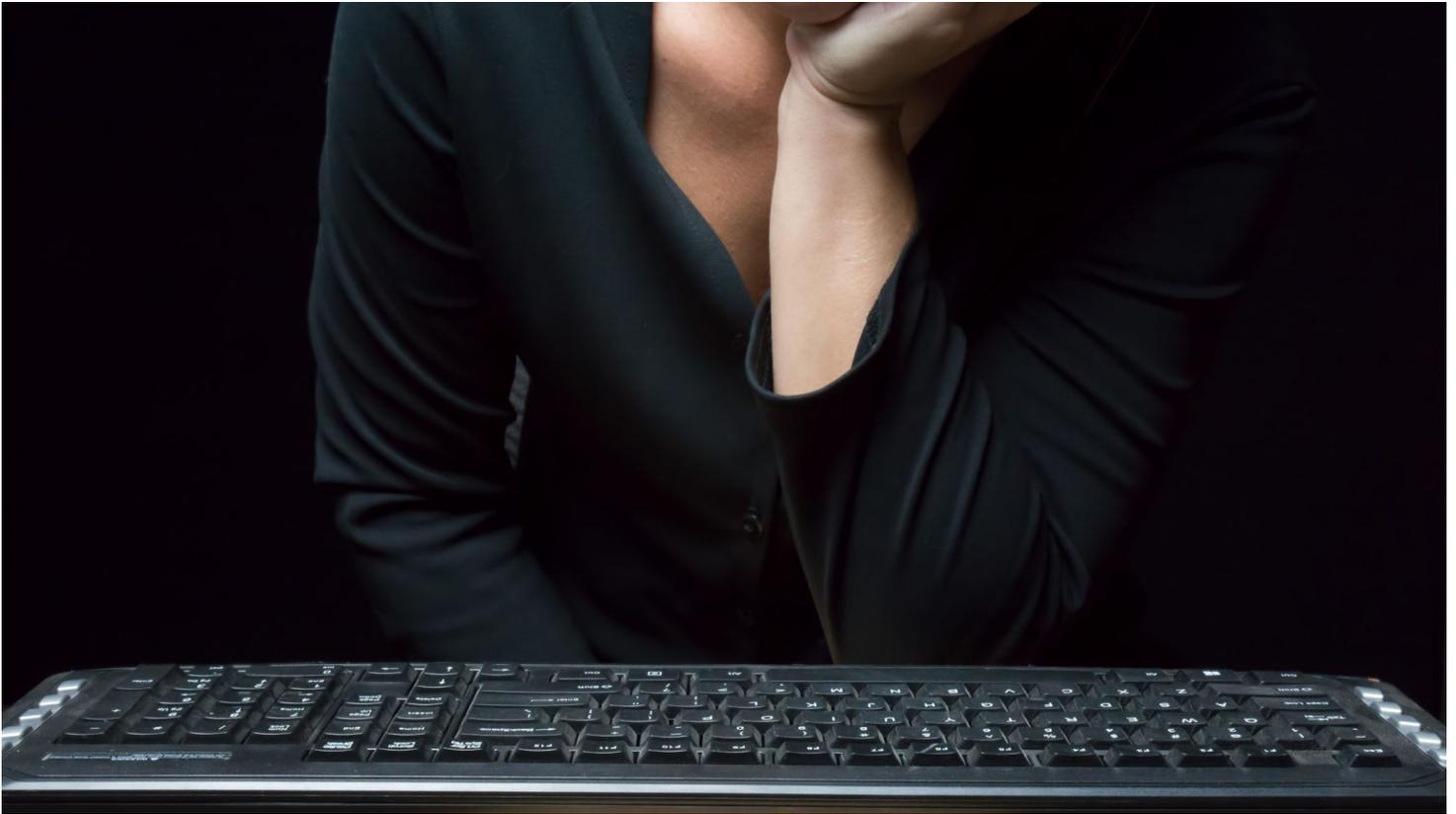


What Began As a Casual Flirtation On Twitter Almost Cost This Mom Custody of Her Son

WD womansday.com /relationships/dating-marriage/a60518/social-media-scam-catfish-sextortion/

10/20/2017



By Linda Childers
Oct 20, 2017

Lynn MacLeod didn't expect to fall in love when she joined Twitter in May 2016. The 52-year-old mother from Vancouver, B.C., was simply looking for a diversion as she coped with the dissolution of her 18-year marriage. She certainly never thought she would become the latest victim of a growing Internet scam known as sextortion.

A month after she joined, MacLeod met Danny*, who commented on how one of her witty tweets made him laugh. The two started talking publicly on the platform, their conversation chronicled on a Twitter timeline, and soon Danny followed up by sending MacLeod a private direct message (DM).



Courtesy of Lynn MacLeod

"Our first DM conversation lasted for three hours," MacLeod says. "I was going through a divorce and I have a special needs son, and Danny was just so easy to talk to and very sympathetic and supportive."

Danny described himself to MacLeod as a single, 50-year-old owner of a computer security business living in Las Vegas. He was charming, funny, and perhaps best of all, he told MacLeod the things she longed to hear.

"In Danny's eyes, I was beautiful and funny," MacLeod says. "He listened and he remembered little details of our conversation such as the fact I didn't like feta cheese. My ex-husband never even remembered specifics like that."

"He listened and remembered little details of our conversation. My ex-husband never remembered specifics like that."

It didn't take long for the conversation to become intimate, and for Danny to ask MacLeod for a more revealing photo. Although she was hesitant, Danny convinced her he would send one of himself in return. They texted every day, often for hours at a time, and began talking about a future together.

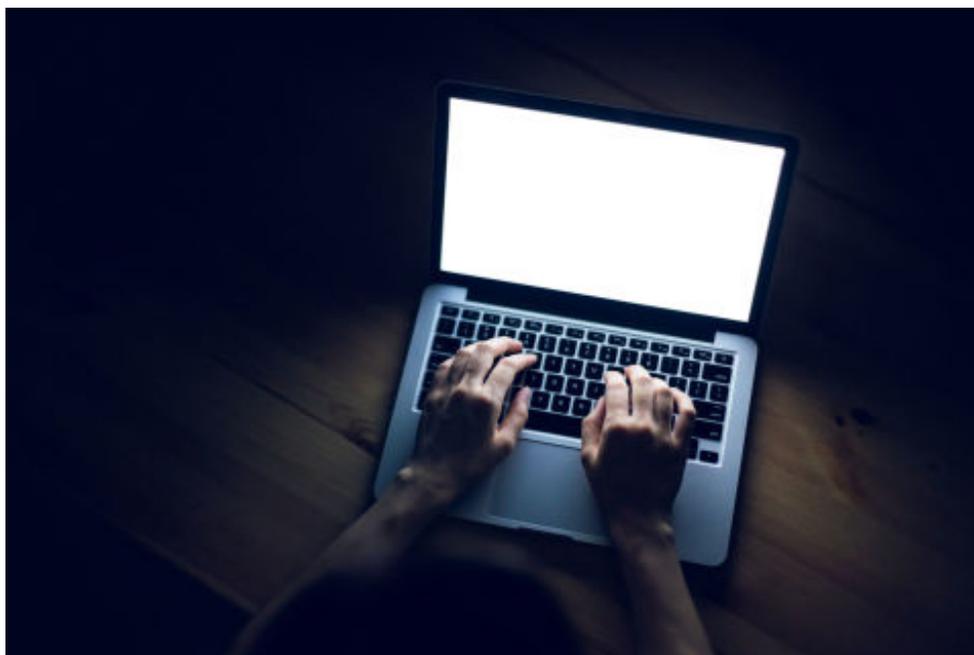
"He told me I was beautiful and exactly his type," MacLeod says. "I felt I needed to lose some weight, but Danny said he loved curvy women."

While MacLeod thought she was being wooed, Terry Evans, president of Cybersleuth Investigations in Buffalo, New York, explains she was actually being "groomed" by an online predator with an ulterior motive. He describes grooming as a process where predators use overt attention, flattery, gaslighting, and secrecy to gain the victim's trust. Often, these predators use fake photos (usually pictures stolen from another attractive social media user).

"Both men and women are being targeted on social media sites including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and more by predators who attempt to assert dominance and humiliate their victims," Evans says. "These 'catfish' are motivated by sex, money, or simply the thrill of exploiting a victim to satisfy their own narcissistic desires."

One prevalent form of exploitation is "sextortion," which the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) describes as a serious crime that occurs when someone threatens to distribute a person's private and sensitive material if they

don't provide images of a sexual nature, sexual favors, or money. Sextortion can be initiated by hacking into the victim's computer or phone, or by "catfishing": adopting a fake persona and luring someone into a fake relationship on social media.



Several months into their relationship, MacLeod began to suspect there was more to Danny's story than he was telling her after he made excuses as to why he couldn't send a photo. He talked about their future together and even made plans to visit her, but then cancelled at the last minute, blaming work and a death in his family.

"I finally realized Danny wasn't being honest, and that for all I knew he could even be dangerous," MacLeod says. "I accused him of catfishing and he became angered and threatened to contact Canada's Ministry of Children and show them the provocative photos I'd sent. He said I might even lose custody of my son."

Only several months later, after Danny deactivated his Twitter account, did MacLeod learn that Danny had also catfished other women on Twitter, at least two during the same period of time. After having a friend investigate the details Danny had given her about his life, she learned there was no one in Las Vegas who matched his description. Danny wasn't the perfect man that MacLeod believed; he was a master manipulator.

Although MacLeod initially blamed herself for being naïve, Evans says victims aren't to blame.

"These savvy professionals often prey on women who are going through a vulnerable time."

"Women need to realize catfishing and sextortion aren't their fault, even if they are duped into sending explicit photos to someone who they became involved with online," he says. "Falling for a catfish has nothing to do with being smart or rational; these are often very savvy professionals who prey on women who are going through a vulnerable time in their lives, and we all want to be loved."

While experts know sextortion is on the rise among adults, Evans says many women are reluctant to come forward out of embarrassment. Yet in order to prosecute a case, Evans notes there needs to be a reported or discovered crime, a known victim, a perpetrator and jurisdiction. Had Danny used his victim's photos to extort sexual favors or additional photos or videos, he could have been prosecuted for harassment and blackmail.

"I work with men and women to validate the identity of the person they are talking to early on in the relationship and avoid being scammed," Evans says. "If the client is already being blackmailed, I can help them identify their blackmailer, and report the crime to the police, rather than face continued harassment."

If you believe you have been the target or victim of a catfish or sextortion scam, contact your local law enforcement agency. To learn more about protecting yourself from online predators, visit [FBI.gov](https://www.fbi.gov).

**Not his real name*