

The Effect of Internet Pornography on Marriage

Internet users spend billions of dollars each year on pornography obtained through cyberspace.

Men tend to use pornography as a means of distraction, to cope with stress, to participate in sex acts that they would not otherwise participate in, and to meet people online. Women report engaging in this type of behavior for educational purposes, support for sexual concerns and purchasing sexually explicit items (Manning, 2006).

Pornography via the internet affords the user anonymity and availability. Over time, internet pornography can impact relationships because the people seeking porn neglect intimate and sexual relationships with their spouses/partners. It can also lead to distorted perceptions of sex, desire for more deviant sexual behavior, viewing non-monogamous relationships as normal, downplaying the importance of monogamy, decreased sexual satisfaction with partners, and not placing value on marriage, intimacy, or relationships. (Dew, Brubaker, & Hays, 2006)

Partners of online porn users who have discovered that their significant others have been viewing internet pornography often feel hurt, angry, inadequate, and as though they cannot compete with online images. Often, the partner feels repulsed, disgusted, and senses a lack of emotional connection during sex. Many reported engaging in sexual acts that they normally would not have in an effort to compete with their partner's online experiences.

Other potential side effects of internet pornography usage include developing a tolerance to material, often even engaging in more bizarre or at-risk activities such as arranging face to face sexual encounters with partners met online; thus exposing unaware spouses to sexually transmitted diseases. Other potential dangers of internet pornography exist as well. Men who admitted that internet pornography usage was a gateway to other activities such as seeking out massage parlors, prostitutes, and actual affairs. Research indicates that many spouses found emotional infidelity to be as severe an offense as actual physical infidelity.

Whitty (2003) examined the definition of what couples constitute as infidelity and offered insight into the difference in emotional versus physical infidelity. Participants indicated that the amount of contact between the internet user and their virtual lovers was not always the source of pain or frustration. The spouses reported their partners desire to seek others for affection and attention caused them the greatest distress. Another result of Whitty's study was that partners who wished to share sexual details and engage in sexual activities with others online exposed couples to a new kind of vulnerability, referred to as emotional infidelity, which was viewed as hurtful as physical fidelity and posed a threat for the future of the relationship. Of the men surveyed, 63% had been married more than 10 years and 78% reported having at least one extramarital affair as a result of meeting someone online. One fourth of the men in this study also reported that they had engaged in either unprotected sex with a partner obtained through the internet while maintaining sexual relations with their spouse.

Manning (2006), reports that internet pornography addiction was a major factor in separation and divorce. According to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers in 2002, 62% of attendees said that the internet played a role in the divorces they handled in the previous year.

Schneider (2003) indicated that cybersex addiction was a major factor leading to separation, divorce, and decreased sexual relations by the user and their spouse. Stack, Wasserman, and Kern (2004) seem to provide support for this research by indicating that the strongest predictor of internet pornography usage was lack of a happy marriage while reporting that individuals who report being happily married are 61% less likely to engage in internet pornography but found that most internet pornography users are married heterosexual males. The discovery of a loved one's secret life in the world of internet pornography does not have to end in divorce. Help is available for those who seek to save their marriage.

Schneider (2003) indicates that there is hope and help available to users of internet pornography.

As with any addiction, the most important step is in helping the user realize that they have a problem. Schneider suggestions breaking down the wall of denial and helping them realize the impact that their behavior is having on their partners and relationships. The reason that they engage in this type of activity must also be examined so that new ways of coping with stress can be either eliminated or avoided. For example, if an individual turns to internet pornography as a means of coping with stress, new ways of dealing with stress can be a point of focus and recovery. Software is also available that is capable of blocking or limiting unwanted pornography sites. Another potential resolution may be for the user to seek some type of support group or 12-step program geared toward their addiction such as Sexual Addicts Anonymous, Sexaholics Anonymous, or Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. The research conducted by Stack et al. (2004) also reported that strong religious bonds were more effective in deterring users than their matrimonial bonds.

References

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