

INTERNET PORN AND EROTICA: AN IMPORTANT ADDENDUM TO “REKINDLING YOUR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP”

Since I wrote the article Rekindling Your Sexual Relationship a number of years ago it has become clear to marriage therapists and mental health professions that the use of internet pornography and erotica has sometimes had a profound and detrimental effect on the real life relationships of couples. This effect was unanticipated by therapists, since the use of magazine or film erotica/pornography was often used as an arousal enhancer for individuals and couples or as a substitute for real life sexual relationships when a partner was not available. So it was surprising to discover that the use of internet erotica and pornography has actually been decreasing the sexual interest and satisfaction that many couples experience.

Why is the effect of internet porn so different from the same type of material in other media? Current theories about this suggest that the rapidity of changing images and the ability to self-direct to increasingly stimulating, novel and unusual sexual imagery can lead to addiction. The actual change to the brain can be significant. Moreover while the internet experience is stimulating and ever lively, a real life sexual experience requires personal interaction and a balancing of needs with the possibility of strain and disappointment. As one user was quoted in Pamela Paul's Pornified: How Pornography Is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, "I don't see how any male who likes porn can think actual sex is better, at least if it involves all the crap that comes with having a real live female in your life."

Other variations on the theme of internet pornography and erotica include internet sex with a paid partner, internet sex with a voluntary but uninvolved partner (often found through a website designed for such encounters), and Instant Messaging or live audio and video sexual relations between people who know each other in real life.

It is astonishing how easily one might be pulled in and soon addicted, starting innocently with looking at sites that come to one's email without any request or sites that are sent by friends. It is happening to "regular" people every day. If you find that your spouse or you have decreased sexual desire for the other it is important to explore if internet pornography or erotica is a factor. One of you may need some help to kick the habit and develop renewed zeal for real between-people sex.

Another helpful resource is Wendy and Larry Maltz' book called The Porn Trap: The Essential Guide to Overcoming Problems Caused by Pornography.