

# Effects of Pornography on Marriage

Roughly 55 to 70 percent of men and 30 to 40 percent of women under age 40 reported viewing pornography in a given year.<sup>1)</sup> Younger generations of Americans—particularly those who accessed the internet during adolescence—have shown the greatest increase in pornography use over the past few decades.<sup>2)</sup> Pornography has harmful and even destructive effects on marriage, and its increased use portends significant social concerns.

## 1. Marital Dissatisfaction

Pornography use **undermines** marital relations and distresses wives.<sup>3)</sup> Husbands report loving their spouses less after long periods of looking at (and desiring) women depicted in pornography.<sup>4)</sup> Dr. Samuel Perry of the University of Oklahoma reported that frequency of viewing pornography was the second strongest predictor of poor marital quality in subsequent years.<sup>5)</sup>

### 1.1 Impact on Wives

In many cases, the wives of pornography users also develop deep psychological wounds, commonly reporting feelings of betrayal, loss, mistrust, devastation, and anger in responses to the discovery or disclosure of a partner's pornographic online sexual activity.<sup>6)</sup>

Wives can begin to feel unattractive or sexually inadequate and may become severely depressed when they realize their husbands view pornography.<sup>7)</sup> The distress level in wives may be so high as to require clinical treatment for trauma, not mere discomfort.<sup>8)</sup>

Viewers of pornography assign increased importance to sexual relations without emotional involvement,<sup>9)</sup> and consequently, wives experience decreased intimacy from their husbands.<sup>10)</sup>

### 1.2 Emotional Separation

The emotional distance fostered by pornography and "cybersex" (interactive computer contact with another regarding pornographic sexual issues) can often be just as damaging to the relationship as real-life infidelity,<sup>11)</sup> and both **men and women** tend to put online sexual activity in the same category as having an affair.<sup>12)</sup> The estrangement between spouses wrought by pornography can have tangible consequences as well: when the viewing of pornography rises to the level of addiction, 40 percent of "sex addicts" lose their spouses, 58 percent suffer considerable financial losses, and about a third lose their jobs.<sup>13)</sup>

In a study on the effects of "cybersex" researchers found that more than half of those engaged in "cybersex" had lost interest in sexual intercourse, while one-third of their partners had lost interest as well, while in one-fifth of the couples both husband and wife or both partners had a significantly decreased interest in sexual intercourse. Stated differently, this study showed that only one-third of couples maintained an interest in sexual relations with one another when one partner was engaged in "cybersex."<sup>14)</sup>

Prolonged exposure to pornography also fosters dissatisfaction with, and even distaste for, a spouse's affection.<sup>15)</sup> Cynical attitudes regarding love begin to emerge, and "superior sexual pleasures are thought attainable without affection toward partners."<sup>16)</sup> These consequences hold for both men and women who have had prolonged exposure to pornography, with the decline in sexual happiness being primarily due to the growing dissatisfaction with the spouse's normal sexual behavior.<sup>17)</sup>

Pornography users increasingly see the institution of marriage as sexually confining,<sup>18)</sup> have diminished belief in the importance of marital faithfulness,<sup>19)</sup> and have increasing doubts about the value of marriage as an essential social institution and further doubts about its future viability.<sup>20)</sup> All this naturally diminishes the importance for them of having good family relations in their own families.<sup>21)</sup>

## 2. Increased Infidelity

Dolf Zillman of the University of Alabama, in one study of adolescents, shows that the steady use of pornography frequently leads to abandonment of fidelity to their girlfriends.<sup>22)</sup> Steven Stack of Wayne State University and colleagues later showed that pornography use increased the marital infidelity rate by more than 300 percent.<sup>23)</sup> Another study found a strong correlation between viewing Internet pornography and sexually permissive behavior.<sup>24)</sup> Stack's study found that Internet pornography use is 3.7 times greater among those who procure sexual relations with a prostitute than among those who do not.<sup>25)</sup>

"Cybersex" pornography also leads to much higher levels of infidelity among women. Women who engaged in "cybersex" had about 40 percent more offline sexual partners than women who did not engage in cybersex.<sup>26)</sup>

## 3. Separation and Divorce

Addiction to pornography is a contributor to separation and divorce. A longitudinal study conducted by Dr. Samuel Perry and Dr. Cyrus Schleifer of the University of Oklahoma found that the likelihood of divorce roughly doubles for men and women who begin pornography use.<sup>27)</sup> According to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, 68 percent of divorce cases involved one party meeting a new paramour over the Internet, 56 percent involved "one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites," 47 percent involved "spending excessive time on the computer," and 33 percent involved spending excessive time in chat rooms (a commonly sexualized forum).<sup>28)</sup> Cybersex, which often takes place in these chat rooms, was a major factor in separation and divorce: In over 22 percent of the couples observed the spouse was no longer living with the "cybersex" addict, and in many of the other cases spouses were seriously considering leaving the marriage or relationship.<sup>29)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> Regnerus, Mark, David Gordon, and Joseph Price, "Documenting Pornography Use in America: A Comparative Analysis of Methodological Approaches," *The Journal of Sex Research* 53, no. 7 (2016): 873-881.

<sup>2)</sup> Price, Joseph, Rich Patterson, Mark Regnerus, and Jacob Walley, "How Much More XXX Is Generation X Consuming? Evidence of Changing Attitudes and Behaviors Related to Pornography Since 1973," *The Journal of Sex Research* 53, no. 1 (2016): 12-20.

<sup>3)</sup> Ana J. Bridges, Raymond M. Bergner, and Matthew Hesson-McInnis, "Romantic Partners' Use of Pornography: Its Significance for Women," *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 29, (2003): 1-14.

- <sup>4)</sup> Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, "Pornography's Impact on Sexual Satisfaction," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 18, (1988): 438-53 (439-440); quoting S.E. Gutierrez, D.T. Kenrick, and L. Goldberg, *Adverse Effect of Popular Erotica on Judgments of One's Mate*, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Anaheim, CA (August, 1983).
- <sup>5)</sup> Perry, Samuel L. "Does Viewing Pornography Reduce Marital Quality Over Time? Evidence from Longitudinal Data," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 46, no. 2 (2017): 549-559.
- <sup>6)</sup> , <sup>7)</sup> Jennifer P. Schneider, "Effects of Cybersex Addiction on the Family: Results of a Survey," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 7, (2000): 31-58.
- <sup>8)</sup> Barbara A. Steffens and Robyn L. Rennie, "The Traumatic Nature of Disclosure for Wives of Sexual Addicts," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 13, (2006): 247-67.
- <sup>9)</sup> , <sup>17)</sup> , <sup>19)</sup> Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, "Pornography's Impact on Sexual Satisfaction," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 18, (1988): 448.
- <sup>10)</sup> Raymond M. Bergner and Ana J. Bridges, "The Significance of Heavy Pornography Involvement for Romantic Partners: Research and Clinical Implications," *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 28, (2002): 193-206 (197).
- <sup>11)</sup> J.P. Schneider, "Effects of Cybersex Problems on the Spouse and Family," *Sex and the Internet: A Guidebook for Clinicians*, ed. A. Cooper (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002): 169-86 (180).
- <sup>12)</sup> Monica Therese Whitty, "Pushing the Wrong Buttons: Men's and Women's Attitudes toward Online and Offline Infidelity," *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 6, (2003): 569-79.
- <sup>13)</sup> Mary Anne Layden, Ph.D., Center for Cognitive Therapy, Department of Psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania, (Testimony for U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, November 18, 2004) 2.
- <sup>14)</sup> J.P. Schneider, "Effects of Cybersex Addiction on the Family," *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 7, (2000): 39-40.
- <sup>15)</sup> , <sup>20)</sup> James B. Weaver III, "The Effects of Pornography Addiction on Families and Communities" (Testimony presented before the Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Washington, D.C., November 18, 2004), 4.
- <sup>16)</sup> Dolf Zillmann, "Influence of Unrestrained Access to Erotica on Adolescents' and Young Adults' Dispositions toward Sexuality," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 27S, (2000): 41-44 (42).
- <sup>18)</sup> , <sup>22)</sup> Dolf Zillmann, "Influence of Unrestrained Access to Erotica on Adolescents' and Young Adults' Dispositions toward Sexuality," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 27S, (2000): 42.
- <sup>21)</sup> Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, "Pornography's Impact on Sexual Satisfaction," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 18, (1988): 448.
- <sup>23)</sup> Steven Stack, Ira Wasserman, and Roger Kern, "Adult Social Bonds and Use of Internet Pornography," *Social Science Quarterly* 85, (2004): 75-88.
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- <sup>28)</sup> Jill Manning, Senate Testimony, November 10, 2005, referencing: J. Dedmon, "Is the Internet Bad for Your Marriage? Online Affairs, Pornographic Sites Playing Greater Role in Divorces," 2002, press release from American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, 14.
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