

INTIMACY, SEX & RELATIONSHIP

A Question About Porn; A Sexless Marriage



DR. SANDRA SCANTLING

This week's column features questions from readers.

Dear Dr. Scantling: I am wondering about your professional take on the subject of pornography addiction? Is there such a thing? Do you think porn use is harmful to relationships?

— **Just Curious, West Hartford**

Dear Just Curious: There is an ongoing dispute among professionals about whether excessive pornographic use should be classified as an addiction in the same way as alcohol, gambling, drug, or other addictions.

I see many couples who are concerned about their own or their partner's dependence on porn and their escalating need for increasing erotic stimulation that continues despite their best efforts to put on the brakes.

Whether we call it an addiction or not, frequenting paid sex workers that puts you or your family at risk, engaging in costly secretive phone sex or waking in the middle of the night to sneak a quick porn fix are just a few examples that your sexual appetite has gotten out of control. Often these behaviors are shrouded in shame and secrecy. The partners who discover these behaviors say they feel angry, hurt and betrayed, fearing they can never measure up to the idealized images on the screen. Although they are told these events are just fodder for fantasy, the arousal they see in their partners is real.

In my opinion, it's not the viewing of porn, per se, that is harmful — it's the meaning of what is experienced and how it affects you and your relationship. This behavior doesn't happen in a vacuum. It may start off as a solitary practice but rarely stays there. There are moral, legal, social, interpersonal and familial consequences.

If erotica is used with the consent of both adult partners and enhances your sexual enjoyment — fine. If you're uncomfortable with the perfect-bodies issue, there are some very good explicit educational videos available that show real loving couples with more average bodies.

But whether or not we formally categorize a set of behaviors as "addictive" — when obsessive thinking or compulsive actions interfere with intimacy or cause distress to either party, it's time to get some help.

Dear Dr. Scantling: My name is Devi. It has been more than a year since my husband, Ranwar, and I got married. I am 23, and he is 31. I married him for the sake of my dad and my younger sister. We were both virgins. He is a good person but very unromantic. He never speaks sexy to me or wants to try different things. He only talks about his business. When we try sex, he finishes on top of me without insertion and then just moves around a little.

I have spoken to him many times, but our talks end up with him getting angry or pleading to 'give him some time.' Now we never talk about sex. I'm upset, and he's ignoring me. Shall we remain friends for life? We'd like to have a family someday.

— **Devi, Plainville**

Dear Devi: Never talking about sex, or living together as "friends," doesn't sound like the relationship you want. And ignoring one another is a recipe for disaster.

Men expect inexperienced women to need to learn how to be comfortable in the lovemaking department. Unfortunately, some women won't cut men the same slack, and they expect them to just know what to do sexually. Men aren't born automatically knowing how to be confident or sensitive lovers. In fact, men who have been successful achievers tend to become especially anxious when their penis fails to "perform" well at that critical moment.

Fortunately rapid ejaculation is a common problem that can usually be corrected quite easily in young healthy men. I suggest you both see a certified sex therapist to guide you through this process with patience and understanding. You might begin by checking out www.AASECT.org

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