

## INTIMACY, SEX & RELATIONSHIP

# A Disturbing Discovery About Spouse's Low Libido



### DR. SANDRA SCANTLING

**F**or their entire 20-year marriage, Marilyn, 46, attractive and effervescent, has been disappointed with her 51-year-old husband Ryan's low libido.

She got by with the help of her vibrator "friends" that were always ready when she was. During those times she'd fantasize about Ryan's strong arms around her and how she wished he were by her side and not her battery-powered "rabbit-habit."

For the first 10 years, Marilyn tried all the usual things to turn Ryan on: lingerie, candlelight, sexy strips . . . but he stayed erotically apathetic. She sometimes wondered if he had someone else "on the side," but he was always home at night — or so she thought.

Little did she know that cleaning the basement would give her the answer. There, tucked behind a tall maple bookcase, was a stack of porn downloaded off the Internet along with a cache of X-rated DVDs.

For a moment, Marilyn found herself getting a little excited. "Maybe Ryan was sexual after all," she thought. "Maybe this will give me a clue to what turns him on . . ."

One by one, she slowly leafed through the images. As she stared at the different scenes he selected for his private self-pleasuring, she immediately saw a pattern. "Why, these are pictures of teens," she thought. Barely legal teens costumed in schoolgirl uniforms to appear much younger than their allegedly 18 years of age.

Marilyn's eyes widened as she stared at their flawless skin, round perfect bottoms and perky little breasts.

"Is this what my husband wants? But they're so young."

She could feel herself trembling as she visualized her own full feminine form.

"No wonder he hasn't been interested in me," she thought. Her angry tears slid down her face, forming small puddles on the photos in her lap. Her mind raced. "What does this mean? What do I do now?"

How would you feel if you discovered, like Marilyn, that your ostensibly low-sex-drive husband is really masturbating several times a week to fantasized images of "sweet young things." What would you do?

To her credit, she confronted her husband and, to his credit, he came clean with another porn stash that was hidden in the ceiling tiles. After a long, difficult talk, Marilyn offered him a decision — therapy or divorce. He chose therapy.

During their couple's sessions, issues of power were identified as a key problem. Ryan had always felt inadequate with women, but had learned to fake it. Although he was drawn to strong women (like Marilyn) he feared their disapproval and avoided intimacy. One day he was sent a teen porn site (unsolicited) and got sexually aroused. There was something about these young innocent women that made him feel unusually "manly." One event led to another . . . and another.

Marilyn and Ryan are still struggling to resolve their intimacy issues. She worries she'll have to become "less of a woman" to keep Ryan's interest and isn't willing to give up part of herself to keep this marriage. But she is learning to understand how she may inadvertently put him down with some of her remarks. She is also working to increase her empathy and awareness of Ryan's shame and anxiety.

To Ryan's credit, he is stepping up to his humiliation and facing his obsessions. He is empathizing with Marilyn's feeling of loneliness and rejection. He has recently decided that his fantasies, urges, thoughts and behaviors are an addiction and he has begun some serious work on relapse prevention.

Being sexually interested in "legal" teen porn is not listed as a diagnosis in the DSM-IV-TR (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) and much more research is needed. But even if this content is legal and considered socially acceptable, the damage it can do to relationships is considerable.

»» Dr. Sandra Scantling is a licensed clinical psychologist and certified sex therapist in Farmington. You can e-mail her at AskDrScantling@aol.com; her website is www.drsandy.com. This column is not intended as a substitute for professional advice. Case material used here is not intended to represent any actual individuals.