

Porn On The Internet: Is My Man A Porn Addict?

By Michael Castleman

Summary

Men and women feel very differently about the meaning of porn.

Men typically use porn as a masturbation aid. They don't consider it a betrayal of their marriages or relationships. They still love their spouses, fiancées, or girlfriends, and don't judge their lovers harshly compared with the women they see on screen. And except for a small group of compulsive porn consumers, the vast majority of men don't consider pornography a substitute for their lovers.

But many women feel differently. Illinois State University researchers visited Internet message boards dealing with heterosexual relationships and collected 100 posts by wives, fiancées, and girlfriends who had discovered that the men in their lives were frequent viewers of Internet porn. They did not consider it an innocent masturbation aid. On the contrary, they felt traumatized and confused. They considered it incomprehensible that their lovers would spend time this way. They considered porn viewing a form of infidelity, proof that their lovers no longer desired them. They also described themselves as feeling old, fat, ugly, and worthless because of their lovers' Internet porn interest.

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With the advent of the Internet, people interested in pornography can view X-rated media anytime day or night at home on their computers.

Who views porn? Overwhelmingly, men. According to *Adult Video News*, the pornography trade magazine, 71 percent of X-rated media is viewed by men solo, 19 percent by heterosexual couples, 7 percent by homosexual male couples, and 2 percent by women, either solo or in lesbian couples. Men who use porn solo account for almost three-quarters of pornography consumption, almost three times as much as all other users combined.

This should come as no surprise. Compared with women, men tend to be more aroused visually. (Women tend to be more aroused by touch.) Mainstream pornography presents a world tailored to men's sexual fantasies. In the world of porn, all women are perpetually horny, sexually available, enthusiastic, and happy to service men endlessly, plus they're indifferent to courtship, intimacy, marriage, birth control, STI prevention, and their own sexual satisfaction. In porn, all men are buffed, sexually alluring studs with huge erections that rises instantly, never falter, and last as long as the men want. And when the men in porn decide to ejaculate, it occurs without any difficulty.

Men who view porn by themselves typically use it as a masturbation aid. They don't consider it a betrayal of their marriages or relationships. They don't love their spouses, fiancées, or girlfriends any less because of it, nor do they judge their lovers harshly compared with the women they see on screen. And except for a small group of compulsive porn consumers (see below), the vast majority of men don't consider pornography a substitute for their lovers. As one man said, "When I look at porn, it's not about my wife or our relationship at all. It's about me and my sexual fantasies. I sometimes get tired of my own fantasies. With porn, I can masturbate to someone else's, and sometimes I like that."

But many women feel differently. Illinois State University researchers visited Internet message boards dealing with heterosexual relationships and collected 100 posts by wives, fiancées, and girlfriends who had discovered that the men in their lives were frequent viewers of Internet porn. They did not consider it an innocent masturbation aid. On the contrary, they felt traumatized and confused by the discovery, and considered it incomprehensible that their lovers would spend time this way. They considered porn viewing a form of infidelity, proof that their lovers no longer desired them. They also experienced deep feelings of loss—loss of the

man's affection, his sexual interest, and intimacy and trust in the relationship. In addition, they often described themselves as feeling old, fat, ugly, and worthless because of their lovers' Internet porn interest. The women who were more accepting called their men "sick" and hoped they could be "cured." Those who were less tolerant called them "perverts, degenerates, or sex addicts" and questioned whether the relationship could endure.

What Does Porn Mean?

Clearly men and women differ about the *meaning* of a man's viewing Internet pornography—and by extension any porn. The Illinois State researchers believe men when they say that porn is nothing more than a handy masturbation aid, and no reflection on the man's mental health, his relationship, or his love for the woman in his life. They offer this reassurance to women: "It's not about you."

For most men, porn represents a form of self-soothing, a way to take a little break from daily hassles, and find comfort in masturbating. Women often self-soothe by taking a hot bath, or shopping. Many men use porn.

Women's Body Insecurities

But as the Illinois study shows, many women become distraught when the men in their lives view porn. "One reason," Weston explains, "is that so many women feel so insecure about their bodies, especially in comparison with the bodies of the women in porn. Another is that many women have an overly romanticized view of relationships. They think they should be able to fulfill all of their man's needs. But they can't fulfill his needs around masturbation, which, by definition happens solo. Too many women think a marriage license is a license to run the other person's life, especially his sex life. It isn't."

"Men and women attach very different meanings to many things," Klein explains. "A visit to her parents may be a pleasure for her, but a joyless obligation for him. The same is true of how couples view pornography. Men like it because it appeals to their fantasies of sexual abundance without responsibility. But women often feel threatened by it because they think: You enjoy looking at those beautiful naked girls because you think I'm fat and ugly."

"As a man myself," Sugrue says, "and as a mental health professional, I know that what guys say is true: Overwhelmingly, they love their partners, think they're great, and have no desire to toss them aside to be with the women in pornography. But they still like to watch porn, and use it for fantasy while masturbating. They

don't see it as cheating or a sign of relationship dissatisfaction. And they don't think any less of their lovers' bodies."

I agree. I'm a fairly typical man. I've used pornography as a masturbation aid, and I've never considered it to mean anything more than that. I don't consider it a form of cheating or unfaithfulness. I don't desire my wife any less. I don't consider the women in porn any more alluring than she is. I don't long to get involved with porn actresses in real life—and unlike most men, I've met several. I'm quite content in my marriage, and porn has never impinged on that. It doesn't matter where you get your appetite—as long as you come home for dinner.

Do Men in Relationships Have a Right to Masturbate?

Some of women's objections to porn have to do with mixed feelings about the men in their lives masturbating at all. Some people believe that self-loving should not be necessary for people who are in committed relationships, that spouses should meet all of each others' sexual needs. That view is naive. Masturbation is our original sexuality. The vast majority of men were happily masturbating long before they met their spouses. Why deny yourself apple pie once you've discovered peach? Most men don't use masturbation to withdraw from their relationships, but rather to relax, to take a little time out, much the way some women enjoy hot baths. Spouses cannot meet each others' needs to masturbate, which involves solitude. It's fine for men to masturbate, and it's fine for them to use pornography to spice it up. The only problem is trying to imitate porn in real life.

Compulsive Porn Viewing

Some of the women whose posts the Illinois State researchers collected were involved with men who viewed pornography for up to several hours a day, in some cases, losing their jobs as a result. When anything sexual interferes with one's ability to live a normal, productive life or maintain an intimate relationship, that's not healthy. Like anyone engaged in any obsessive-compulsive behavior, men who can't control their porn consumption should seek professional counseling. A sex therapist would be a good choice. To find one near you, visit aasect.org, the site of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, or sstarnet.org, the Society for Sex Therapy and Research. —Michael Castleman

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