

PORNOGRAPHY

HARMFUL EFFECTS ON THE HEART

PORN CHANGES YOUR SEXUAL TEMPLATE

Many young adults never have the chance to learn what a healthy relationship is like before porn starts teaching them its version—which is typically filled with violence, domination, infidelity, and abuse. Since most people aren't too excited about the idea of being in an abusive relationship, the sexual education that youth have gotten from porn makes it hard for them to connect with real romantic partners when they're ready, and they find themselves unable to be turned on by anything other than images on a screen.

As people get older and get into relationships, porn promises a virtual world filled with sex—more sex, better sex. What it doesn't mention, however, is that the further a user goes into that fantasy world, the more likely their reality is to become just the opposite. Studies show that porn often leads to less sex and less satisfying sex; and for many users, porn eventually means no sex at all.

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Partners of porn consumers often report feeling angry, confused, and betrayed when they find out that the other half of their committed relationship has been watching porn. Consumers may have no idea how they are hurting their own relationships and the people they love.

No one ever woke up and said, "Today, I want to get out there and ruin my current and future relationships. I'm going to cut myself off emotionally, undermine trust, and leave my partner feeling confused, rejected, angry, and betrayed."

No one says that, but a pile of research shows that's exactly what can happen as a result of consuming porn.

It's probably no surprise that women tend to view porn and its effects very differently from men.

While women and men can both struggle with pornography consumption, studies have shown that many women—even if they believe that pornography consumption is okay for other people—see no acceptable role for porn within their own committed relationship. And no wonder! The evidence that porn can harm relationships and partners is overwhelming.

Two of the most respected pornography researchers, Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillman at the University of Alabama, studied the effects of porn and media for more than 30 years. They found that consuming pornography makes many individuals less satisfied with their own partners' physical appearance, sexual performance, sexual curiosity, and affection.

They also found that, over time, many porn users grow more callous toward females in general, less likely to value monogamy and marriage, and more likely to develop distorted perceptions of sexuality. Other researchers have confirmed those results and added that porn consumers tend to be significantly less intimate with their partners, less committed in their relationships, less satisfied with their romantic and sex lives, and more likely to cheat on their partners.

That doesn't bode well for any relationship where one partner is consuming porn, especially since most of us want and expect our intimate relationships to be built on trust, respect, commitment, honesty, and love.

It is very common, when partners find out that their other half has been consuming porn, for them to feel a whole range of negative emotions including rejection, humiliation, abandonment, isolation, loneliness, jealousy, anger, and shame. Even if they don't believe that porn is the same as cheating, they often feel a deep sense of loss, betrayal, and mistrust. The secrecy, shame, isolation, and lies that are often introduced into a relationship by compulsive porn consumption can snowball into all kinds of problems.

But even if porn isn't kept a secret—even if partners are open and honest about their consumption—it can still do real harm. We mentioned earlier that porn consumption can lead to less satisfaction and less interest in one's partner. Why does that happen? Part of the answer is that porn rewires the brain, so that consumers of porn become less responsive sexually to their partner, even though they can still respond to porn.

At the same time, porn reshapes expectations about sex and attraction by presenting an unrealistic picture. In porn, men and women always look their best. They are forever young, surgically enhanced, airbrushed, and Photoshopped to perfection. So it's not hard to see why, according to a national poll, six out of seven women believe that porn has changed men's expectations of how women should look. As writer Naomi Wolf points out, "Today real naked women are just bad porn."

But it's not only physical looks of both men and women that get distorted in porn. Women are also generally portrayed as anxious for sex anywhere, at any time, with anyone, and they are delighted to go as long and aggressively as one man or multiple men want. They always climax, usually loudly and ecstatically, and then are immediately ready for more. They never get tired or sore. They never need a break. In fact, they never seem to need anything at all except endless sex. They are depicted as happy with whatever a man wants to do, even if it's dangerous, painful, or humiliating.

If you think those unrealistic depictions don't work their way into consumers' beliefs, expectations and actions think again. In a recent survey of 16 to 18-year-old Americans, nearly every participant reported learning how to have sex by watching porn, and many of the young women said they were pressured to play out the "scripts" their male partners had learned from porn. They felt badgered into having sex in uncomfortable positions, faking sexual responses, and consenting to unpleasant or painful acts.

Of course, the pain caused by porn can go far beyond a bad experience in the bedroom. Individuals who learn of their partner's porn habit often internalize their shame and confusion, asking themselves why they aren't "enough." They may feel undesirable, unattractive, and worthless. Many partners of porn consumers even start showing physical symptoms of anxiety, depression, and even Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. And while it's true for both men and women, studies have shown that because of the shame they feel and their worry about being blamed for their partner's problem, the majority of women who learn of a partner's porn use isolate themselves at least somewhat from their normal sources of social support, just when they need that support the most.

PORN IS A LIE

In porn, everything—from the way people look, to the way they have sex—is a fantasy. Porn consumers often become so obsessed chasing the fantasy that they miss out on actual love and relationships.

Back in the 1950s, two researchers named Tinbergen and Magnus played a trick on butterflies. After figuring out which marks on female butterfly wings were most eye-catching to males, the researchers created their own cardboard butterfly models. They exaggerated the patterns on the wings to make them brighter and flashier than would ever be found in nature. Essentially, they created the world's first butterfly supermodels.

And the male butterflies fell for it. They went straight for the cardboard mock-ups and tried to mate with them. Ignoring the real female butterflies that were right there in plain sight, the males gave all their attention to the exaggerated pictures. Sound familiar?

Like the duped butterflies, porn consumers can get so obsessed chasing flashy fantasies that they miss out on real life and real relationships. Call it the first great lie of porn:

PORN LIE #1

You can have it both ways; you can enjoy the immediate gratification of thousands of virtual sex partners and the long-term satisfaction of a real relationship.

The truth is, porn often takes a heavy toll on real-life relationships. When they discover that their loved-one is using porn, many partners feel shocked, rejected, abandoned, humiliated, and betrayed. (See *How Porn Hurts A Consumer's Partner*.) The idea that "porn is a personal decision that affects no one else" is simply wrong.

But even if your partner has no problem with porn, it can still damage your relationship. Studies have clearly shown that porn erodes a person's ability to love and feel loved with a real partner. When men are exposed to porn, they rate themselves as less in love with their actual partners, and less satisfied with their relationships and sex lives. They become more critical and dissatisfied with their partner's appearance, sexual performance, sexual curiosity, and displays of affection. Ironically, porn is directly related to problems with attraction, arousal, and sexual performance, as well as lower sex drive, erectile dysfunction, and difficulty reaching orgasm. (See *How Porn Damages Consumers' Sex Lives*.)

One recent study examined men who used internet porn compulsively and found that, in 11 out of 19 subjects, porn consumption had lowered their sex drive and/or ability to maintain erections in physical relationships with real women. Oddly enough, those men were still able to respond sexually to porn. Like Tinbergen's butterflies, porn can leave people preferring internet porn over an actual partner. Chances are, your partner is not okay with that.

PORN LIE #2

Porn is just watching people have sex—what could be more natural and normal than that?

Actually, sex is natural and normal. Porn is something entirely different.

Make no mistake, porn is a product. Pornographers have a lot to gain by driving traffic to their sites, so they dress up their product to grab your attention. That “dressing up” is exactly what makes porn so unnatural.

Professional porn performers have a whole team of people to make every detail look perfect, from directing and filming to lighting and makeup, maybe even a plastic surgeon or two to thank. With some careful editing, a typical 45-minute porn flick that took three days to shoot can appear to have happened all at once, without a break. Film the right bodies from the right angles at the right moments, edit out all the mistakes, Photoshop away any imperfections, add a catchy soundtrack, and you have something most definitely NOT like “natural” sex with “normal” people. You end up with something more “cardboard” than “butterfly.”

PORN LIE #3

Porn is just an innocent distraction and a harmless pastime.

Leading relationship experts, Doctors John and Julie Gottman have expressed serious concern about the effects of pornography on couple relationships. They explain, “Pornography may be just such a supernormal stimulus. With pornography use, much more of a normal stimulus may eventually be needed to achieve the response a supernormal stimulus evokes. In contrast, ordinary levels of the stimulus are no longer interesting. This may be how normal sex becomes much less interesting for porn users. The data supports this conclusion. In fact, use of pornography by one partner leads the couple to have far less sex and ultimately reduces relationship satisfaction.”

Once a person is aware of the damage they are doing to themselves, (See [How Porn Changes the Brain](#)) their loved ones (See [How Porn Hurts A Consumer’s Partner](#).) and society (See [How Porn Fuels Sex Trafficking](#)), using porn can hardly be called harmless or innocent.

PORN LIE #4

Porn is a safe way to learn about sex.

This lie is especially troubling because many young porn consumers really do rely on the warped fantasy of porn to form their ideas and expectations about sex. That’s scary for a lot of reasons. Young people who consume porn often expect their partners to act out what they’ve seen, even if it’s painful, degrading, or dangerous. They tend to believe that what they see in porn is normal and acceptable, even as their tastes in porn grow more extreme over time. And as people adopt the unrealistic standards of porn, they end up feeling bad about themselves and dissatisfied with their partners.

Learning about sex from porn also means absorbing a lot of dangerous ideas about sexuality and women. (See [How Porn Warps Ideas About Sex](#).) Amateur porn, which claims to be more natural and real, actually teaches the same attitudes and reproduces the same false stereotypes as professionally produced porn—sometimes worse! Ultimately, porn doesn’t deliver the satisfaction and healthy enjoyment it promises. It leads to damaged relationships, disappointment, and isolation. (See [Why Porn Leaves Consumers Lonely](#).) Tinbergen’s butterflies were simply reacting to instinct when they were fooled by the “supermodel decoys,” but humans are not victims of their evolution. You can choose to recognize porn for the deception it is. You can reject porn’s lies and choose real life, real relationships, and real love.