

Internet Addiction and Internet Sex

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We are living in exponential times. Over one billion people in the world have access to the Internet. The population of the United States in 2006 was 299 million. Approximately 220 million Americans now have access the Internet and 40% have high speed access. Children go to the Internet for information, entertainment, relationships and support. The number of text messages sent each day is greater than the population of the world. If MySpace were a country, the number of registered users would make it the 11th largest country.

Americans are going on-line looking for information, entertainment and relationships. Use of the Internet (also called the Net) has grown faster than any technology in history including the telephone, television, computers, video games and CD players. The Net provides everyday users with primarily the Web, e-mail, instant messaging, live chat and the ability to purchase goods and services on-line.

"You've Got Mail..." *I Don't Care.*

"Do you want to know more?" *Nope!*

"Do you want to see a picture of a naked man?" *Of course not!!*

"Do you want to see a picture of young boy

having sex with an older woman?" *Not on your life!!!*

"Would you like to talk to a beautiful lonely woman on-line

and see what she looks like?" *Never!!!!*

"Have you have had sex with someone that you have not had sex with in person?" *How is that possible?*

People are naturally skeptical when they hear someone say there are problems when using the Internet. Here are several important research facts.

- *Women are now on-line more than men.*

- *50% of the people on-line lie about their age, weight, job, marital status and gender.*
- *20% of the people going on-line will experience clear negative impacts to their life.*
- *Use of the Internet is a contributing factor in nearly 50% of all family, relationship and family problems.*
- *11% of the people going on-line are becoming compulsive or addicted.*

How could anything that feels so safe and innocent looking be unhealthy for so many people? Feeling good and not realizing the problem is precisely the problem. People can go anywhere, see almost anything, find out virtually anything, do anything and be anybody they want. They act out in ways that are exciting and they can do without leaving their chair or being with a real person. Accountability, supervision and social consequences are missing in a virtual society.

Problems

The potential problems for new Internet use are significant and may be growing. Nearly 20% of the people going on-line will encounter one or more of the following problems.

- *Personal neglect*
- *Compulsive checking and "clicking"*
- *Isolation and avoidance from people*
- *Lost productivity*
- *Depression*
- *Marital problems*
- *Sexual addiction*
- *Gambling away savings.*
- *Internet abuse in the workplace*
- *Academic failure.*

Are You Compulsive or Addicted To The Net?

Using the Net is not a problem for Internet users who are on-line less than two hours a week. Heavy users are at risk when they are plugged more than 18 hours a week. There is no official diagnosis for an addiction to the Internet. The proposed disorder is called Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD). There is rather exact criteria proposed but it essentially easy to spot a problem. A compulsive and potentially addicted user is on-line more than 10 hours a day in non-work related activity. Answering the question "Am I addicted?" is based on four questions.

1. *Do you feel better when you are on-line, chatting, or exploring the Net?*
2. *Are you or have you been spending more and more time on-line?*
3. *Are you on-line when you should be doing something else?*

4. *Have you tried to cut back and don't?*

You probably have a compulsion if you feel a strong need to get on-line when you should be doing other things in your life. For instance, "Are you forgetting to eat?" Or, "Are you getting up at 3 a.m. in the morning to go to the bathroom and checking your e-mail before you go back to bed?" Checking e-mail at night when no one else is up and for no reason is a compulsion. You may even have early signs of addiction if you feel a need to be on the Internet more and more and feel worse when you stop.

Cyber Society

People go on-line and they are making friends. For many people the Internet is like a private night club or the place where you can find the friends you've always wanted. You don't have to go out and find real people and have an honest relationship. You can stay in your own chair and explore endless activities. You can walk away and come right back. There is always something happening. People will even miss you and ask you to come back. If you embarrass yourself, or people get mad, then you can just change your name, age and marital status and just start over.

It doesn't take much in the way of bravery to go into the Net. Once you're in, a user can go anywhere and see almost anything without social consequences or anyone knowing. As result, the Internet is a fostering uninhibited social and sexual behavior. There are clear impacts on relationships when people become uninhibited, dishonest or secretive in life or on the Net. There is much less honesty, integrity and accountability on the Net than there is at work, in school or in a neighborhood.

The Internet is now a contributing factor to nearly one half of all marital or family problems. In some cases, relationships are breaking down when a men or woman develops a relationship in cyber society. High levels of Internet use can produce social isolation, loss of real intimacy and depression.

Men, women and families are going into counseling for relationship problems that are partly or entirely caused compulsive internet use or virtual addictions. Women are filling for divorce claiming that their husbands are having sex on-line or looking at "pornography" for hours every day. Kids stay up all night. Parents stop relating and spend less time raising their children.

The Internet is not only cutting into social and family time but it is also cutting into work. For some employees the Internet is just part of the job. But up to 70% of employees who have high speed Internet access at work can spend up 1 hour a day involved in non-work related activities. At least 6% of people at work use the Internet

more than 6 hours per week for non-work related activities.

Cyber Brain Washing

Knowing what can happen to you, your friends or even your children won't necessarily help. Heavy users will tell you that the Net will change you. If you spend enough time on-line, the rest of the world starts to look unreal or strange. You may not even notice the change. There is no sure way to know if you will get hooked or how long it can take. Here's how it happens.

Prolonged chats on-line and mouse clicking on the Internet will produce what psychologists call a dissociative state. Net users separate from reality and enter cyber reality. Anyone with children has seen how children can watch television for countless hours. Children and even adults watching television long enough will enter a "hypnotic trance." They "meld" into the television and disconnect from reality. Limited use is a form of healthy recreation or escape. Prolonged and repeated use can create problems.

People can disappear into a good book or a movie, but there is always an end to a book or a movie. The Internet is especially addictive because the Net is endless, interactive, social and exploding with never ending images and information. The Net offers exciting relationships 24 hours a day all over the world. Before the Internet children and couples stopped working and talking with their friends after dark. Spending the evening together reading, playing games and watching television together was the norm. But not anymore.

How do people get caught up in the Net? For one thing, human beings are curious. We like to see more and do more. Many of us like to travel. When we can't travel, we like to read books and go to movies. We like to feel competent and in control. Human beings like to feel better and they don't like to feel bad. We like to do things that feel good and avoid things that feel worse. We especially like doing pleasurable things more and more. Being on the Internet is not necessarily about having a good time. Being on-line might make you feel better but it might just change how you feel. It can be an escape from reality that isn't necessarily better for you. For some people, a painful or disgusting fantasy is preferable to a less painful or disgusting reality.

Have you ever noticed that some people watch television even when there is nothing good to watch. And instead of turning the TV off, they resort to channel switching. The act of switching channels repeatedly is an annoying process that makes the rest of us want to leave the room or take the remote control away from somebody. The Net is a lot like television only the Net is timeless, interactive, challenging and endless.

Psychologists explain the seduction and addictive nature of the Net primarily in terms of a behavior modification process called a variable reinforcement schedule. That means you don't know how much of a reward you will get and when for your behavior. A variable reinforcement schedule is the most addictive reward system. Slot machines are designed and operate in the same principle.

When you keep playing a slot machine, the odds are that you will eventually lose everything. But the human brain loves the possibilities and excitement of "winning" in the moment and it ignores the long term consequences. The occasional win doesn't make up for the overall loss. People play anyway because the occasional win is highly rewarding for those who play long enough. Some people can walk away and stay away. Other can't walk away or they always come back.

The Internet is also more addictive than a slot machine – especially once they begin to master the technology. Playing on the Net can give you self-confidence. A slot machine doesn't. The most common rewards from a slot machine are those curious noises, spinning pictures and flashing lights. Once in a while a person wins some money.

Would you believe it, a cable modem is more addictive than a slower dial-up modem. Most people had no patience for the Internet when they had a dial up modem. The rewards were slow and boring. That changed when high speed modems allowed for rapid "clicking" and responses. People with high speed modems are now disappearing into a world where they wait anxiously for the result of the next click. The surprise, shock value and speed in which a person gets these "hits" of information and imagery are the key to creating a compulsion and addiction. Time begins to have no meaning when your next "hit" is just a "click" away. There is no time to think about something else you could or should be doing - unless you are waiting. People don't think of what else they should be doing and they increasingly find there is always time for one more click and one more chat.

More than a slot machine, everything on the Internet is an adventure with social opportunities. It can be mildly or tremendously exhilarating. People feel rewarded when they finally figure it out why their software or a web site is not working. Every improvement in your skills including upgrades in software and your access to new and exciting links can produce a mind altering change in your brain chemistry. The most powerful change is called a dopamine rush. Dopamine is a chemical in the brain that controls brain function including decision making, impulsiveness, and it is released when you experience certain stimulation. It can improve your mood, confidence and produce a feeling of pleasure.

Cyber Sex

Men dominated the Net until just recently. Women are on-line more than men now.

Men seek out pornography more than women. Women are seeking out relationships. But men and women are using the Internet equally for "cybering" (cyber sex). Cyber sex is defined as the consensual sexual discussion on-line for the purpose of achieving arousal or an orgasm.

People involved in cyber sex universally minimize the importance and impact of their behavior. They say "It's was just on-line" or "It's not real sex." Patients are telling counselors and therapists that having cyber sex with an adult is not an affair (assuming it really was an adult and not a teenage boy). Marriage and family counselors are no longer asking, "Did you had an affair?" Or, "Did you have sex with someone?" We are now asking "Have you have had sex with someone that you have not had sex with in person?" The bad news is that some teenagers are becoming sexual addicts by the age of 16. The good news is that they are not necessarily having intercourse yet.

What's changes people most is their access to sexual content. People would never have access to such a wide range of sexually explicit material without the Internet. They can get it quickly and easily. It's really easy for children to explore the Net for hours at a time without being caught. The problem is that people become "cross involved" with other content when they are exploring less intense material. There are web sites that are gateways to other more explicit and shocking content. Before long people can end up involved in sexual content that is way beyond their original interest and desire. It eventually becomes sick.

Many people go on-line to find information. But unfortunately the most perverse human and even human-animal sexual interactions are available on-line. The biggest "rushes" for the severe addicts come from violent sexual cruelties that are available on-line. People tell themselves that can just click and look for a second, but they don't realize that the trauma and stimulating effects are addictive. The most addictive content is the most shocking that changes your mood quickly. A quick look at graphic violence is a "rush" even if you find it offensive. Normal people can become addicted to disgusting content not because they approve but because it changes and excites their mood. People become excited and disgusted at the same time.

As people become more comfortable, they begin to disappear and literally live on-line. Some will eventually move from back from the Internet to the real world. Eventually some will start seeking out people for real sex instead of cyber sex. A "danger downloader" is someone who views content that eventually creates a compulsion to explore potentially dangerous behavior in real life. "Danger downloaders" actually go out to fulfill their sexual fantasies with people who have cyber names like "Slave Master".

Internet Propaganda

People argue that the Internet saves time, but most people are merely spending more time learning how to save less and less time. The end result is that home users are losing track of time and spending countless hours mastering and playing around with a technology that accomplishes nothing and generate no income. They end up getting behind on work, chores, child care and spending time with real people.

Internet technology does not add to the quality of life for most people. It provides a sense of mastery especially because the technology is unreliable and it requires people to master a changing technology. It is interesting challenge and often rewarding.

Did you know that more and more web sites are structured to get you there, keep you there, expose you to advertising and get you to spend money? All kinds of trickery and technology are being used to manipulate people. For instance, WhiteHouse.Com is a pornography site. The real White House web site is at WhiteHouse.Gov. And if you mistype the address of a web site for an airline or famous person you could end up in a web site for sadomasochistic bondage. Even worse, you might find that you are trapped and can't get out. Backloading is a technique where you can't get out of pornography web sites once you get in. You eventually realize that you have to shut down your computer, but not until colorful, sexual and even traumatic images are burned into your brain.

The Real World Vs Cyber World

Would you let your child go anywhere and spend time with anyone they wanted?

Do you want your child working on homework, playing music or shooting baskets with potential friends?

Do you want your child spending 2 to 4 hours a day on the Internet playing games, looking at pictures, talking with strange people in chat rooms or visiting a "private bedroom" while they pretend to be an adult?

Would you let your husband go over to the house of a woman you don't know and spend hours talking about love, sex, his dreams, his frustration and the difficulty raising your children while he lies about his marital status?

Do you want to meet people on-line when you know that most of that relationship is based on a lie?

Do you want to work at building a real friendship that could last a lifetime?

Would you let your child go to the library if a pornography shop was in the back and no adults were watching? Or worse yet, would you let your child go into a pornography shop where adults were watching?

Psychologists agree than most things in life that have value require effort to accomplish. The Internet is a tool, but not a life. The Internet is a technological challenge, but it is not a real life challenge. It provides users with a sense of mastery in a machine world but not society, work, school or a relationship. The Internet allows for uninhibited social and sexual interactions. The Internet creates a feeling of adventure. It is stimulating and it can easily become shocking. If you need to be certain, go to www.Google.Com and run a search using sexual words. Then be prepared to be shocked at what you, your family and friends can easily find without charge and without verification of age.

There is no doubt that the Internet is becoming a substitute for an active life. The Internet is socially safe. But does it really help with shyness? You can go anywhere and be anyone you want on the Internet. Overweight people don't need to become physically active and eat properly, they can pretend they are young, beautiful and buff, and no one will challenge their fantasy. Shy teenager girls and boys can have sex on line without fear of rejection. You can look at anything and talk to anyone you want without your parents, friends or spouse finding out. There is virtually no accountability when you are on-line.

The research on children is becoming very interesting. It turns out that teenagers are in greater risk than adults. Shy boys and girls in large school are especially vulnerable to having problems. Small schools have a lower incidence of teenage Internet addiction. Shy kids in large schools are withdrawing into their rooms. Some are becoming withdrawn, disturbed, and impatient. A few are becoming a violence risk. It should be no surprise that some teenagers prefer the cyber world and become infuriated and lonely in the real world.

Children with ADHD are especially vulnerable. The Internet appears to have a calming effect and is the perfect escape from distractibility. Instant messaging presents the greatest risk for ADHD teenagers. It is not only becomes compulsive but it puts teens in virtual proximity to adults pretending to be kids.

Internet use began to cut down on family TV time. But now people are on the Internet while they are watching TV. Chat, E-mail and Instant Messaging have become major forms of entertainment for an older children and teens.

Prevention

The Internet has been designed to be visible and accessible. At present, there is no way to effectively prevent access to inappropriate content nor is there a reliable way to restrict activity. What methods exist can be circumvented by clever children and adults. Fortunately there are a number of ways to control Internet use.

Businesses have developed the technology to monitor employee Internet use in the work place. Employees are less likely to abuse this resource if they know it is being monitored. Human accountability and social consequences are a major deterrent.

Another way to create accountability is to place a computer in a public place. Visibility creates social pressure and consequences for actions. People are less likely to view socially objectionable material in public. Signs of compulsive behavior will become apparent to friends, peers or family members when Internet use is public.

While business has adopted technology to monitor employee use, families do not yet have ready access to such software. There is software to load onto your computer and to your Internet services provider that can monitor and let parents and adults know how their computer is being used.

Psychological and even physical safety are real concerns since children are connecting to all the information on the planet. Very few parents would not let their child go anywhere anytime and speak to anyone. Likewise, parents should not allow their child to go on-line unless they know where they are going and who they will be with. Leaving a child alone in their room with access to the world is a risky decision.

You can't allow yourself to become Internet ignorant if you care about your relationships or family. You need to know what your employees at work and family members are doing. What adults do in their free time is their business. What you employees and children do is another matter. Children under the age of 16 are not ready to drive a car and they are not capable of resisting or understanding the dangers of being on the Internet. Monitoring and supervision is essential.

Finally, prevention is more likely to be assured if you maintain balance in your life. People go on-line looking for something missing in their life or they become involved in content and relationships on-line that begin to interfere with important routines, responsibilities and relationships. Making a conscious effort and commitment to a balanced life is crucial.