



IS PORNOGRAPHY a “Drug Addiction?”

Written by Dr. Randall F. Hyde & Mark B. Kastleman - #R004

The mountains of clinical data and visual evidence as millions continue their out-of-control porn use despite consequences of divorce, loss of employment, destroyed reputations, prison time, etc., shouts the obvious: “YES, PORNOGRAPHY IS ADDICTIVE!” And just in case there are still a few stubborn hold-outs, research is being conducted by some of the world’s leading experts in the neuroscience and neuropsychology fields that will provide the clinical evidence required to officially enter sex and pornography as “addictions in the DMS (Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).

Some cringe with labeling pornography as “addictive” because they believe doing so affords the porn user an excuse: “I can’t help myself, I’m addicted.” This is a preposterous position. When someone is addicted to alcohol, do we excuse his behavior because “he can’t help it?” Just because someone suffers with an addiction doesn’t mean he doesn’t have a choice. For many years, my colleagues and I (Dr. Hyde) have worked in our clinics helping individuals break free from pornography and many other addictions. There is always a choice when it comes to breaking free from addictive behaviors.

The more important question is not “Is pornography addictive?” but rather, “Is pornography a drug addiction? Does pornography use lead to a chemical dependency commonly experienced with illicit street drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and prescription drugs? Is pornography use “substance abuse?”

My response is two-fold:

1 When an individual ingests or injects a “drug,” that chemical travels to the receptors in the brain and other parts of the body, seeking to “mimic” the body’s own natural neurotransmitters. In effect, the drug tries to “fake” the body into releasing its own natural or endogenous chemicals. For example, Prozac triggers the body to release its own natural serotonin. Likewise, pornography “mimics” sexual intimacy and “fakes” the body into releasing a tidal wave of endogenous chemicals, which is exactly what pharmaceutical and illicit street drugs do. Can pornography not then be referred to as a “drug?”

2 For those who insist on precision in the use of scientific terms such as “drug,” allow me to put your minds at rest. Can we agree that pornography viewing triggers the release of the body’s own endogenous chemicals, just as sexual intimacy does? And that the porn viewer can become addicted to these internal chemicals just as he would if the release were triggered by a pharmaceutical drug? Is this not chemically-induced addiction?

As renowned psychologist M. Douglas Reed states: Addiction [can] exist within the body’s own chemistry.¹ And Howard Shaffer, head of Harvard’s Division on Addiction declares: I had a great difficulty with my own colleagues when I suggested that a lot of addiction is the result of experience-repetitive, high-emotion, high-frequency experience. . . . But it’s become clear that neuroadaptation that is, changes in neural circuitry that helps perpetuate the behavior-occurs even in the absence of drug-taking.²

One of the world’s leading researchers in the field of pornography as a chemical addiction is Dr. Judith Reisman. For decades she has worked closely with some of the best minds in neuroscience and neuropsychology to prove that pornography should indeed be considered a drug, a chemical dependency, a form of substance abuse. Consider some powerful statements from her and her colleagues in a widely published research paper:

A pornographic psychopharmacological flood yields epinephrine, testosterone, endorphins (endogenous morphine), oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin, phenylethylamine,³ and other pharmacological stimuli. In her book published by the Institute of Medicine, Sandra Ackerman notes that epinephrine alone gets the “vertebrate brain” “high” on its own self produced morphine or heroin.⁴ Pornography, designed to alert the procreation instinct to the need to immediately respond, would be especially likely to cause users to self-medicate, kick-starting these endogenous LSD, adrenaline/norepinephrine, morphine-like neurochemicals for a hormonal flood, a “rush” allegedly analogous to the rush attained using various street drugs.⁵

Arousal dependence [through pornography] may be compared to biochemical alterations related to excessive amphetamine use. Satiation effects [hours looking at Internet porn] may be compared to those related to opiate use. Fantasy behavior can be related to such neurotransmitters as dopamine, norepinephrine, or serotonin, all of which are chemically similar to the main psychedelic drugs such as LSD.⁶

Vanderbilt University psychiatrist Peter Martin’s research on “normal subjects” finds the brain activity experienced in sexual arousal of his normal subjects “looks like that accompanying drug consumption.”⁷ Addiction [can] exist within the body’s own chemistry. Any activity that produces salient alterations in mood can lead to compulsion, loss of control and progressively disturbed functioning.⁸ Pornography is not like a drug, it is an endogenously processed poly drug providing intense, although misleading, sensory rewards.⁹

However you choose to say it, pornography addiction is a chemical addiction, or, if you prefer, pornography causes the body to release endogenous chemicals which the viewer becomes addicted to. The bottom line is: “pornography is a drug.”



1. Paper presented to the National Family Foundation Convention, The Role of Pornography in Compulsive or Addictive Sexual Behaviors, November 10, 1990 in Pittsburgh, PA, Psychologist M. Douglas Reed, p. 15, 1, 3 2. Dr. Judith Reisman, The Psychopharmacology of Pictorial Pornography, Restructuring Brain, Mind & Memory & Subverting Freedom of Speech, The Institute for Media Education, 2003, p. 23 3. Candace Pert, cited in Bill Moyer’s Healing and the Mind, Doubleday, New York, 1991, p. 177 4. Sandra Ackerman, Discovering the Brain, Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1992, p. 76-77 5. Dr. Judith Reisman, The Psychopharmacology of Pictorial Pornography, Ibid., p. 21 6. M. Douglas Reed, The Role of Pornography in Compulsive or Addictive Sexual Behaviors, Ibid. 7. Dr. Judith Reisman, The Psychopharmacology of Pictorial Pornography, Ibid., p. 23 8. M.

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