

The Brain and Porn Treatment Models for Pornography Addiction

Presented by Heide McConkey, Director

What is Pornography Addiction

- Addiction to pornography is not primarily defined by if, what, how often, or how long a person is using porn, but by their motivation for using porn.
- Porn addicts rarely enjoy their acting out. They do not want to feel 'high'. They want to feel less.
- Watching porn helps the addict to cope with psychological, emotional or physical stress and trauma.
- Porn addicts depend on high arousals, stimulated by explicit sexual imagery, and tend to develop lowered sexual desire/libido with their real life partners.

Trauma Histories

- Most addicts disclose a history of childhood traumata
- Emotionally rigid and detached family of origin
- Development of shame throughout childhood
- Early age sexualization
- Emotional abuse, neglect or physical abuse, sexual abuse
- Absence of age appropriate sex education e.g. family or school
- Low awareness of one's own needs

Attachment Bond

- Of the sexually addicted clients I have treated, most shared a childhood history of unsafe or confused attachment bond to their primary carer or carers.
- This gap in safe attachment/love is likely to be filled with alternative pleasure generating behaviours.
- Such replacements later in life may include food, sugar, sex, alcohol, substance, money, possessions, gambling, work, success, status.

American Society of Addiction Medicine

- Addiction is a primary chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry, and not simply a behavioural problem involving too much drugs, alcohol, gambling and sex.
- The addicted individual pathologically pursues reward and/or relief by sexual or substance behaviour.
- Addiction is characterised by inability to control and persistently abstain from compulsive behaviours, cravings and chronic relapse,
- And a diminished ability to recognising significance of problems, dysfunctional emotional response, and dysfunctional interpersonal relationship ability.

Institute for Addiction Study

Kevin McCauley MD, Salt Lake City, Utah

- 'Addiction is a stress-induced defect acting on a genetic vulnerability in the reward-learning system of the midbrain (dopamine system) and the memory choice system in the prefrontal cortex (glutamate system), leading to loss of control, cravings and persistent drug use despite negative consequences.'

SA/CSB is Identifiable & Diagnosable

- fMRI results confirm increased activation in three significant brain regions in porn addicts
- Ventral Striatum (processing rewards)
- Dorsal Anterior Cingulate (anticipating rewards)
- Amygdala (processing significance of events and emotions)
- Study samples mirrored brain responses as seen in drug addicts
- Research led by Dr. Valerie Voon, University of Cambridge, UK, 2014

The Brain in Sex Addiction

- The recently (2014) released Cambridge research study is a step forward to universal acceptance of ASAM's definition of sexual addiction.
- The study confirms the three regions of the brain are similarly activated in sex addicts, when shown explicit sexual imagery, as compared to drug addicts, when exposed to drug related imagery.
- Sex Addiction is currently not included in the DMS 5.

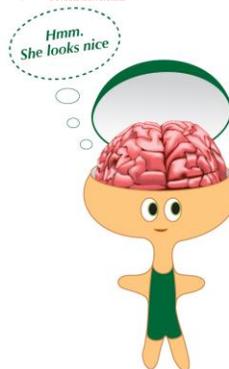
Sexual Health & Risk Behaviours

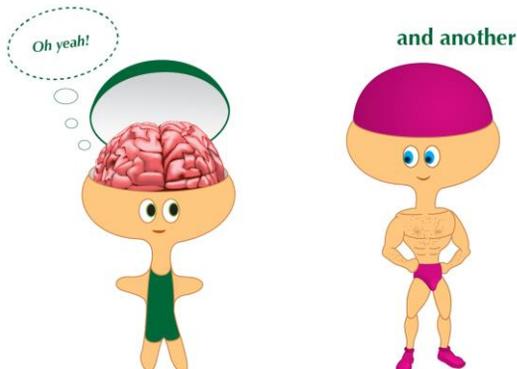
- Watching Pornography in itself does not include a risk to STI
- Many Porn Addicts lose the distinction between fantasy, reality and intimacy, and escalate to explicit sexual uses of e.g. their spouse, casual partners, prostitutes, massage parlours, pursuing sex with strangers, and/or dangerous sex
- The addict's inability to control and delay urges may lead to unsafe sexual practice and to a considerable risk of infecting with, and spreading, sexually transmitted diseases Breaking Through Denial
- Sex Addicts display a tendency to other non-sexual adrenaline/PEA dependency behaviours, e.g living on the edge, dangerous sports, high finances, high success.

Consequences for the Untreated Sex Addict

- Behaviours escalate
- Loss of primary relationship/love/family
- Loss of workplace
- Loss of money/assets
- Loss of friends
- Isolation/depression
- Loss of self respect, self-hatred
- Loss of (sexual) control
- Distorted spirituality and cognitive distortions, increased anxiety
- Increased risk to physical harm, illness, and STIs
- Anhedonia
- Imprisonment
- Suicide

a (reasonably) normal sort of person meets another person...





Summary

- Sex Addiction is NOT a Moral Failure.
- Sex Addiction Stigma delays Treatment.
- Sex Addiction is a Fully Treatable Disorder of Brain Rewards and Related Circuitry.
- Psychiatric disorders may be underlying. Dual treatment approach is recommended.
- Only about 10–15% of Pornography users ADDICT to Porn. Less than 2% receive treatment
- The exact causes of addiction are not known. Sex addicts share histories of confused/unsafe childhood attachment bonds, emotional neglect/withdrawal, and early childhood sexualisation

References

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<http://www.impulsecontroldisorders.org/html/cravings.html>
- Institute for Addiction Study, Salt Lake City, Utah, Kevin McCauley, (Vaccaro PhD 2010)
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Thank You

- Thank You
- Discussion