

A growing number of women are not only viewing porn, they're becoming addicted.

hooked on a ~feeling~

By Becca Cipriani

In decades past, pornography was considered a guy thing, involving women only as the objects of desire (playmate) or the objects of pity (housewife with addicted husband).

But a growing number of women are viewing porn — and becoming addicted.

What attracts women to porn? Pornographers have become savvy marketers to women, says Mark Kastleman, author of *The Drug of the New Millennium* (PowerThink Publishing) and director of Education and Training at *candeo.com*. Rather than focusing on body parts and domination (the key turn-ons for males), female-targeted porn is based on relationships and mutual consent. So they produce tender stories of developing romance that leads to consummating the relationship (adultery or fornication). It's the same plot of nearly every romance novel and soap opera.

But why do women keep going back to porn, becoming addicts of what would normally disgust them? Porn sets off neurochemicals in the brain that cause addiction just like cocaine does (see “This is Your Brain on Porn” on page 47).

“The addictive property cannot be ignored,” says Judith Reisman, author of *Kinsey: Crimes and Consequences* (Hartline Marketing). “We carry around our own drug store within us.”

“It's a powerful form of self-medication,” according to Kastleman. “Porn rivals the power of street drugs or alcohol, but with no apparent side effects or stigma. It's a convenient ... escape.”

Women face the same work and life stresses men do. Women's brains respond to neurochemicals just as men's do. And so, women can get addicted to porn just as men can — for the rush, the escape, the momentary feeling of satiation.

But how do women get exposed to porn in the first place? According to Kastleman, the key entry point for women is chatrooms. Looking for people with similar interests or simply someone to talk to, women enter chatrooms for “connection, communication, relationships,” says Kastleman. “And in those chatrooms on Facebook, Twitter,

or social networking sites, they're being led into porn sites as part of the conversation.”

Women who get locked into porn from these chats usually fall into two categories: those who are eager for acceptance or those who are eager to explore a different facet of their personality. “Those who want to be accepted, valued, and affirmed are willing to take directions they wouldn't normally take,” Kastleman explains. “They don't want rejection, so when their cyberbuddy suggests, ‘You should go check out this sex site, then we can talk about it,’ they do it.”

The other category is the woman who may be shy in real life, but is the diametric opposite online. She can be a more dominant personality in the virtual world, but never give up her anonymity, Kastleman says. She tries porn sites after suggestions from cybersuitors, not realizing that her online activity will affect her real-world personality. But it does.

Women also are introduced to porn through their husbands or boyfriends, says Reisman. “Husbands imply, ‘That's what real women do,’ pointing to the magazine [or Web site], adding, ‘It's exciting, so let's try it.’ And women adjust to the male standard of what's attractive. When virginity and modesty were considered important, they followed it. And, now, when the “uninhibited” standard is popular, they conform to it. Even churchgoers fall prey to it under the guise of submitting to and pleasing your husband.”

Porn is still about objectifying body parts, regardless of the story that introduces them. “The female in porn is still valued by what her parts look like,” says Kastleman. “It's a degrading and myopic view that women are subconsciously accepting.”

And after decades of viewing body-parts-centered mainstream movies, TV shows, and magazine covers, porn just helps to cement that objectifying mind-set. “Women have bought into the argument,” Kastleman says, “seeing themselves only as valuable as what their body looks like. They objectify themselves, then rate and objectify other women.”

This mind-set spawns a competitive focus on physical appearance, neglecting any emotional, intellectual, or spiritual growth for the crown of looking good. It also dredges up depression, anxiety, and other emotional health issues

when the beauty standard isn't met. As more women adopt a detached perspective on sex, Kastleman says, the long-term effect is alarming: Two no longer become one; instead, two use each other and become the sum of their parts.

Porn compels women to judge the outside, not the inside — giving up God's perspective (1 Samuel 16:7, "For man sees what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart") and any chance to love themselves or others well.

Kastleman cautions, "Stop buying into the message of being valuable or desirable if you look like movie stars or magazine covers. Women are about so much more than that."

Porn also distorts a God-given enjoyment in sexual intimacy. "Once women step into the world of porn," Reisman says, "they find that their usual intimacy falls short." Why? Porn, of course, ignites a sense of shame (this is wrong) and fear (what if someone discovers this about me?). "Fear is more arousing than sex," Reisman explains, "so when you combine fear with sex in viewing porn, you're off the charts. Your husband doesn't set off that fight-or-flight trigger in you because you trust him. So your encounters with him seem subpar," causing women to be further ensnared in porn and further isolated from their mate.

"Intimacy is meant to keep the homefires burning," Reisman says, "but porn burns the house down." □

Becca Cipriani is a writer/editor in Nashville, Tenn., who noticed that she does compare her post-pregnancy body with those of magazine covergirls. Who knew self-objectifying could happen at the supermarket checkout?

How to talk to your daughter about porn

In the past, having a parent-child talk about avoiding porn was considered a Dad-Son speech. But nowadays, moms need to step up to the podium to address their daughters.

"Teen girls are now raised on a media that's blatant and callous in its sexuality," Kastleman says. Women are portrayed as focused narrowly on sexual things — their looks, the number of partners they've had, their lack of attachment to those partners — and teen girls, without another media example to emulate or imprint on, are adopting those atypical attitudes and activities, focusing on their body parts and the sensations they can get from them.

"As much as parents don't want to think their kids are involved," Kastleman warns, "I can assure you they are talking about it in grade school and up. As parents, we have to open communication even when we're not comfortable. The media is forcing our hand."

How do you start the conversation? With the obvious: "Sex is powerful," Kastleman says. "Tell them how it works — emphasize the science. Describe the brain chemicals that are released and what they do — dopamine, the pleasure chemical (which acts like cocaine or alcohol), and oxytocin, the bonding chemical. Then ask, 'Are you sure you want to be bonded to this individual, this photo?' Teens really appreciate that mature, direct, factual conversation, rather than 'Sex is dirty, dark, and evil and, by the way, save it for someone you really care about.'"

Romance novels aren't porn, are they?

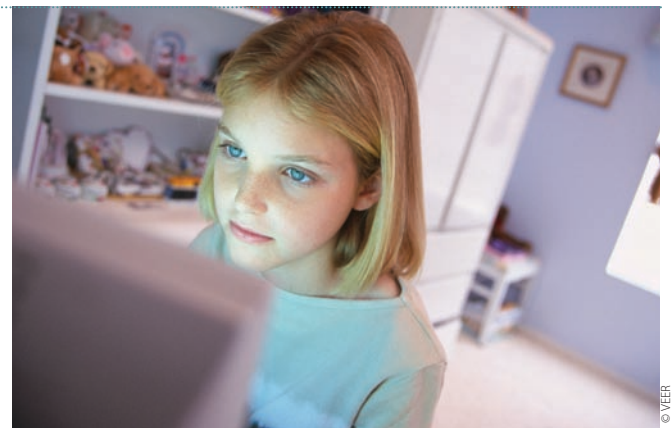
CONCERN 1: Am I getting a distorted view of men since the man in my life (my husband) isn't equally as sensitive, rich, adventurous, well-spoken, or muscular as the male protagonist in my novel?

ANSWER: Would your husband be getting a distorted view of women if his reading material presented them as perfectly proportioned, sexually available, wealthy, need-free, non-talkative chefs? Your reading material is placing unrealistic demands on your husband, setting you both up for disappointment — just like porn does.

CONCERN 2: My romance novel has sex in it, but it's at least between people who are married.

ANSWER: Granted, it's an improvement over the novels espousing one-night stands or long-term dating sex. But descriptions of sexual activity are still voyeuristic scenes of titillation that don't serve a good purpose. These scenes get burned into your mind (thanks to norepinephrine) and could distance you from your spouse during intimate times together. And these images bond you to that novel (thanks to oxytocin), since you associate it with pleasure and relaxation (thanks to serotonin). Yep, sounds like porn again.

Check out "This Is Your Brain on Porn" on page 47 for more information about porn and the chemical reactions in your brain.



Also, awkward as you may feel, your daughter feels the same or worse. But your goal is to create an inviting environment in these talks. Kastleman says, "Tell them: 'If you have questions, I won't embarrass you or tell you you're wicked or unworthy.' Avoid in any way shaming your daughter with regard to sex or her body. Sex is not taboo; it's a gift that's good. It's how we were designed to be by our Creator. We want

to make sure they reserve it for the right time, place, and person: in a lifelong marriage."

"Help your daughter feel good about herself. The greatest deterrent to involvement in porn is boosting self-esteem, emphasizing not what she looks like but who she is. Talk about her gifts and talents. The more inner worth she feels, the less likely she is to self-objectify."