

YOUR BRAIN™

If some malevolent being held a competition to create the perfect delivery mechanism to enslave our human desire, Internet pornography would win the grand prize. You must understand that online pornography is fundamentally different from the *Playboys* or *Penthouses* of past generations. If the magazines, videos, and DVDs of the past were like the Wright brothers' plane at Kitty Hawk, then Internet porn would be a supersonic jet. Although supersonic jets are impressive for military use or high-speed travel, you wouldn't want one landing in your backyard. But this is the impact Internet porn makes on the brain. Its sheer power and intensity create a heightened level of stimulation that your brain was never intended to experience. Because of this, the brain of a man regularly using porn can change and shape itself to resemble neuropathways similar to those of an alcoholic or drug addict.⁸

Much of what is written on the relationship between compulsive porn use and the brain emphasizes the addictive power of orgasm. No one would argue that the orgasm is one of the most powerful physical, emotional—and some would say spiritual—experiences of being alive. Scientists have shown that in those moments of ecstasy and surrender, the release of serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin, and norepinephrine is as powerful in the

brain as heroin.⁹ But what, then, makes porn so different from having sex or masturbating? The answer will surprise you.

Internet porn overstimulates the brain. This occurs in four unique ways. First, our brains crave novelty, and the Internet provides an endless variety of novel sexual images. When I was a young man looking at magazine centerfolds, images lost their appeal within a short amount of time. But with online porn, new images are instantly available with the click of a mouse. With each new image, our limbic system releases a burst of dopamine, which tells us we *gotta have it*.

The connection between novelty and sexual arousal is well established by what scientists call the *Coolidge effect*.¹⁰ After dropping a male rat into a cage with a receptive female, researchers initially observed intense copulation between the rats. Eventually, the male rat exhausted himself; even when the willing female rat wanted more, he was spent. However, when the original female was replaced with a *new receptive female*, the male rat immediately revived and began to copulate again. This pattern was repeated over and over until the male rat was literally exhausted. With the introduction of a novel sexual mate, this process will be repeated again and again until the male succumbs to exhaustion or death.

In the real world, even Hugh Hefner doesn't enjoy an endless supply of women to revive his sexual

capacities at any given time. But in the unreal world of online porn, new and ever more stimulating “mates” provide complete novelty without ever needing to step away from the computer. As long as the novelty continues, the arousal continues—while dopamine fuels the desire engine. One man I recently spoke with averaged six hours a day viewing porn. In his case, every click on a new image released more dopamine, which inflamed his desire. You can see already that a vicious cycle is set in place.

A second reason why Internet porn overstimulates the brain is that it provides no limits on the amount we can consume. In food and substance addictions, a person either runs out of the drug or food, or is physically unable to tolerate more. A man can eat only so many pizzas or smoke only so much crack before reaching the obvious limits. With Internet porn, an infinite supply is available. And as long as a man has an Internet connection, he can continue to binge. This is why it’s not uncommon for addicted men to stay up all night viewing porn, and even lose track of time.

The third reason Internet porn overstimulates the brain deals with tolerance. Tolerance occurs when a person needs more of the substance or activity to get the same effect. Over time, we grow increasingly tolerant to certain stimulants. With drugs and food, tolerance typically means eating more frequently or consuming larger amounts. With Internet porn, a

man can overcome the tolerance effect two ways. He can increase the amount by spending more time viewing porn. Or he can overcome his tolerance by escalating the intensity of the images he sees. That’s why men often move from the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue to soft porn to hardcore porn to degradation, bestiality, rape, or other scenes typically deemed repulsive and shocking. They do this not because they are predisposed to it, but because the strong emotions of shock, disgust, or shame provide the sought-after dopamine burst. Gravitating toward aberrant sexual behavior becomes the only way to get a fix.

Finally, Internet porn overstimulates the brain because it’s available on demand. Again, unlike substances that require the user to arrange for a fix, a man carries a forever stash of porn in his mind without even turning on the computer. Every time the images come to mind, he experiences a burst of dopamine in his neuropathways. Combine these four factors and you have a perfect storm brewing in the neurochemical sea of the brain. Over time, the brain is physically changed, and the man becomes addicted to his own brain chemistry.