

Cybersex, the Internet and Cable Television
It's Impact on Sexually Acquired Behaviors in Adolescents and Children

KEVIN B. MCGOVERN, PH. D.
JILL MCGOVERN, PH. D.

Cybersex and the dawning of yet another sexual revolution in the 21st Century have arrived. Children and adolescents are being bombarded with overexposure to sexualized materials from a number of readily available venues. What is happening to the Baby Boomers' babies as they mature through childhood and adolescence trying to develop meaningful relationships through chat room romances emails and other Internet sites? The media, along with other technological advances, have impacted the present generation's sexual attitudes and morals in an unpresidential fashion. Game Boy – 2 and Virtual Reality fantasy relationships are becoming common preoccupations. These and other interactive video games are influencing this generation's sexual development.

The sexual revolution of the late 60's and early 70's promoted "free love" or uninhibited, unhampered expressions of human sexuality. Sexual relations before marriage became more acceptable. Multiple sexual partners were encouraged. Homosexuality, unmarried couples living together, movie stars sharing their most intimate secrets and artificially produced test tube babies were more openly tolerated. X- rated movies such as "Deep Throat" were viewed in modern day movie theatres, not just in adult bookstores or seedy massage parlors. The EST movement of Werner Erhardt was under way. Baby Boomers were encouraged to enhance their sensitivity towards others' feelings especially towards minority groups. There was the Gay Rights movement, the Equal Rights movement for women and the Civil Rights movement. Sensitivity groups emerged across the country particularly on college campuses.

Sexual attitudes had become boundary less. However, the emergence of the deadly AIDS epidemic of the 80's changed attitudes about permissive sexuality. This disease put some boundaries on "free sex", open marriages and the "sex anytime you want it" movement. Spontaneous sexual relations needed more planning and less impulsivity. Men and women both used condoms. Blood tests were even encouraged by medical organizations, to prevent pregnancy and to avoid death. Sexual attitudes were being modified and as they took a more conservative and less promiscuous turn. The public realized that a spontaneous sexual relationship with an unknown companion could cause their death through the acquisition of a virulent disease.

As the 21st century emerged there were noticeable transitions from miniskirts to revealing tank tops, pierced body parts and tattoos. Sagging pants that revealed boxer shorts replaced blue jeans. With the advent of RAP music, the computer literate generations of the baby boomers' children have entered the 21st Century with the Internet creating the second wave of a sexual revolution. Are we ready? Minors are being bombarded by

profanity, sexuality and violence. Sexuality proliferates in the pop and rap music, on prime time television, on the big screen, and on cable TV as today's youth view adult sexual relations and listen to sexually charged vocabulary. Sexually explicit jokes have become part of children's vocabulary. Watching their favorite movie star starve to death while glamorizing their breast implants with revealing clothing has had a profound psychological impact on adolescents that has yet to be determined. The impact can be complicated, complex and far reached. The effect on teen's attitudes has yet to be measured. The proliferation of personal ads, "soft pornographic" advertisements in local newspapers, free flyers for adult entertainment on street corners, and sexually suggestive TV commercials are enticing and could destroy the moral fibers of the children of the 21st Century. In addition to the daily challenges of substance abuse, adolescents now are faced with the psychological complexities of these sexual issues.

Even more influential on today's children are the technological advancements into the electronic market place. Computers with Internet and e-mails capabilities provide children with easy access to pornography with the click of a mouse. Even with security programs such as Informed Parents, Net Nannies and other software technology that are designed to block out pornographic materials, many children know how to override these blocks and enter these sexualized websites on a regular basis. Youth today are exposed to a variety of sexual behavior, including kinky and unusual modes of sexual expression, some of which includes child pornography. In addition to the 900-number accesses to immediate phone sex connections, minors can use their e-mail servers to enter chat rooms and engage in sexually primitive conversations with a stranger. Who knows who is on the other side of this Internet Connection? They are met with no controls as they instant message into the night. Through e-mail, people, even serial killers, can pretend to be anyone they want to be. This form of communication encourages an impersonal and pretentious manner of relating to a world of sexual intrigue and on some occasions murder. Predatory adults can pose as teens and males can pretend to be females. Several months ago, a man was arrested for the multiple deaths of a number of vulnerable women. They had met this serial killer through the Internet. After an Internet relationship had been established, the victims would travel to this predator's home for a weekend adventure. A number of these women's bodies were eventually found decaying in oil drums scattered around the murder's property.

Particularly vulnerable to this form of e-mail communication are those children and adolescents who are shy and withdrawn, have poor social skills, lack friends, or have low self esteem. Many have been victims of vicious teasing by their peers. Several of these minors lack the confidence to meet others, engage in conversation, share their feelings or confront difficult situations. With Internet communications, these youth have an avenue of communications, which was not possible ten years ago.

Over the last several years, there has been a growing concern regarding the increased availability of sexually explicit materials on the Internet. Obviously, these sexually provocative visual stimuli can have a profound impact on the sexual preoccupations and behaviors of children and minors. Within seconds, an individual can view an array of pictures depicting a variety of sexual habits. Pornography distributors have spent

millions of dollars in advertising in order to persuade users to buy memberships allowing them to view sexually explicit materials ranging from nudity to sexual perversions.

A recent article entitled "A Lust for Profits" published in Newsweek magazine by Brendan Koerner (March 27 of 2000), indicated that "according to Nielsen Ratings, 17.5 million surfers visited porno sites from their homes in January, a 40 percent increase compared with four months earlier. The top E-Porn site-Porn City.net boasted more unique visitors in January than ESPN.com, CDNOW, or barnesandnoble.com." In addition, "A Forrester Research report estimates that cyber porn sales-including videos and accessories ordered on line-accounted for 8 percent of last year's \$18 billion E-commerce pie." Although this industry appeared to be dominated by males; interestingly, a number of female entrepreneurs are now involved in the acquisition of pornographic sites on the Internet. (Podlas, K., 2000.)

Viewers are surfing the Internet for sexually explicit materials, pictures, video clips, live sex acts and extraneous sexual information. Other viewers are engaging in chat room activities of a sexually explicit nature. Unfortunately, both male and female minors posing as adults are discovering these explicit sexual attractions. Some of these minor viewers are meeting chat room partners. After establishing an Internet connection, some of these minors eventually engage in sexual activities with these strangers. In a number of these cases, they will contract a deadly disease (McFarlane, et al., 2001). In many cases, their Internet lovers are adults posing as minors. Some of these alleged minor acquaintances have even sent them airplane tickets or money so that they can meet in another state where there are fewer chances of them being detected and arrested.

Other chat room viewers are trading lewd pornography on the Internet. These and other unhealthy sexual practices are occurring on a daily basis on the Internet nationally and internationally. Although erotic materials on cable TV have already influenced the sexual attitudes and behaviors of adolescents, the flood of these readily available, sexually explicit materials and live events on the Internet may be overwhelming and harmful to specific populations of uninformed children, adolescents and their parents. The Internet Pornography Industry has not yet published any scientifically sound research regarding the impact of these sexually explicit materials on adults or minors.

The article entitled: "Early Puberty-Why Girls Are Growing Up Faster" (Time, October, 2000), the author advises, "sexualized messages bombarding kids from all sides could be triggering changes in the brain that jump-start development." The powerful combination of sexualized messages offered through various modes of commercial advertising and now the Internet may intensify this oversexualization of children leading to premature physical and sexual development. Television programs, movies, magazines, novels and commercials often glamorize sexual themes. When these materials are coupled with readily live porn sites on the Internet, this combination may cause a synergistic effect that continues to promote the early sexualization and premature development of children. Are youthful minors really prepared for this flood of sexually explicit materials and related pressures?

This article further advises: "The physical dangers of sexual harassment and sexually transmitted diseases-and, for those who start menstruating early as well, pregnancy-are only the most obvious fallout of premature development. Academic pressure, drugs and alcohol in the schools, peer pressure and sexually explicit media are all conspiring to foreshorten childhood, with consequences that are still not well understood."

Parents want to believe that their children do not view sexually explicit materials. They report that "my child would not view these sorts of things; or that my child does not have access to the Internet because we do not own a computer and, or my child will not become a victim of premature childhood sexual development." Many parents often have distorted perceptions and are guided by mythology rather than reality. Internet pornography is often more available than drugs and alcohol. For example, children are viewing pornography at home under the watchful eye of their parents. Many adults do not understand the complexities of their computers. Their major achievements include connecting with AOL or Yahoo. They have no idea how to determine whether or not their children are viewing these materials. A number of parents are shocked when they receive excessive charges to their credit cards because of their children's unauthorized use of the Internet. In addition, friends are allowing others to use their Internet connections. Teenagers are now trading erotic pictures and video strips that have been downloaded and stored in a number of cleverly labeled files. Other adolescents are viewing these sites at their friends' or relatives' homes. Some adolescents obtain these sexually explicit materials at a local library, a friends' computer, or a parents' place of work. There are many sources available to creative minors especially with the use of certain Internet servers. Computer hackers love to find creative ways to access certain sites and servers. In some cases, the creative consumer easily circumvents security blocks.

Some minors become overwhelmed and obsessed by exposure to these sexually explicit materials displayed on the Internet. This flood of sexually stimulating materials could lead to excessive sexual preoccupations, premature sexual development, precocious sexual activities, and an increase in sexual drive, fantasies and activities. In some cases, a number of minors have engaged in criminal sexual behavior after viewing these materials. In addition to these concerns, exposure to these materials can fuel an underlying sexual addiction or propensity to engage in other forms of maladaptive sexual behavior. There is a major difference between an adolescent sneaking a peek at his father's outdated Playboy magazine versus an adolescent spending hundreds of hours on the Internet each month viewing a broad spectrum of sexual activities ranging from nudity to sado-masochistic activities. The Internet porno companies do not warn the viewer about the potential negative impact of these materials. Of course, these companies do warn the consumer not to enter these sites unless they are eighteen years of age. However, they have no way of verifying the real age of the viewer.

CASE EXAMPLES:

The following case scenarios will illustrate a number of concerns that have developed through the advent of Internet and sexually explicit materials.

Case 1. A fifty-three-year-old, retired mechanic was recently arrested for engaging in sexual behavior with a ten-year-old female minor. He enticed this minor into sexual activities by introducing her to sexually explicit images on the Internet. This minor did not have previous exposure to these types of visual materials. During subsequent sexual incidents, this adult would again use these visual materials to reduce her inhibitions and to normalize his nudity, masturbation and the fondling of her genitalia. From his point of view, they were just practicing what they had seen on the computer. This retired mechanic is now facing long-term incarceration while his victim is involved in an intensive therapy program.

Case 2: A thirteen-year-old male, after his exposure to hours of sexually explicit materials on the Internet, attempted to have intercourse with his eight-year-old, stepsister. Fortunately, she reported this problem to her mother almost immediately after this unfortunate event occurred. Both minors were referred to therapy in order to ameliorate the negative impact of this incident. This adolescent explained that he was just trying to replicate what he had viewed on the Internet. He added, "the people on the Internet appeared to be having a lot of fun having sex together. He did not understand that his step-sister would be alarmed by his request." His mother contacted a local agency about what happened. Due to mandatory reporting laws, this thirteen-year-old adolescent was referred to family court and eventually placed on probation.

Case 3. A mother recently referred her twelve-year-old son for counseling regarding his unique sexual practices. Apparently, he had been observed engaging in oral sex during a recreational outing with a younger female friend. This mother was initially convinced that her son had learned about this type of behavior by listening to a series of media reports regarding the President and Monica Lewinsky. From her point of view, these media reports had a graphic, suggestible effect on her son. Further inquiry into this child's access into the Internet revealed that he had learned this type of behavior by viewing numerous sexually explicit sites on the Internet at his cousin's home.

Case 4. In the following case scenario, a mother and daughter decided to bring lunch to their father at work after attending a church service on a Sunday morning. He was unable to join them at church because of an extremely demanding work schedule. When they arrived at his office, they decided to surprise him. After carefully approaching his office, they were shocked to find him mesmerized by graphic sexual pictures on his computer. They discovered that he was watching erotic materials on the Internet while stimulating himself. When he discovered that his wife and daughter were standing behind him, he quickly shut off the computer. Upon further inquiry, he explained to his wife and daughter that these materials had accidentally appeared on the Internet. He was going to contact his computer server and immediately be disconnected from that service. He could not believe that: "God fearing people like himself should be tempted by such lewd and lascivious materials."

Case 5. A six-year-old male child came upon his adolescent brother watching sexually explicit materials on the Internet. His older brother convinced him not to tell his parents. The younger brother agreed that he would not complain if his brother showed him how to

find these intriguing pictures. Several months later, the younger brother began to draw sexually explicit pictures at school and showed these illustrations to his friends. A concerned teacher confiscated these materials and consulted with the student about his drawings. The child finally admitted to his teacher that he had acquired these images from what he had seen on the Internet. This child and his brother are now involved in a counseling program.

Case 6. A woman recently found her husband watching pornography on the Internet in a room adjacent to the family theatre room. After discussing her concerns with a friend at work, she learned how to access his history file. She learned that in addition to viewing sexually explicit materials on the Internet, her husband had down loaded a number of sexually explicit pictures and had spent an inordinate amount of time in the Chat rooms. She was horrified that her children could find and distribute these materials to their friends in the neighborhood. Although her two adolescent children initially denied any awareness of these Internet materials, one of her children finally admitted that he had been into his father's cache file and had found a number of these explicit sexual materials.

Case 7. A distraught mother learned that her thirteen-year-old daughter had been communicating with a fifteen-year-old adolescent from Kent, Ohio. Her daughter explained that they had similar musical interests. Over time, her daughter became consumed with her Internet companion. She would find her daughter communicating with this individual during the early morning. Eventually, with a friend's assistance, she was able to access her daughter's conversations with this individual. Further research established that Henry was an adult male. Henry had also learned that this family was going on a vacation to New York City. He had planned to meet this minor and then fly away to another city with her. Henry was eventually made an offer by a local police officer that he could not refuse. This chat romance came to an abrupt end.

Case 8. Amanda is thirteen-years-old, an excellent student, and a very good athlete. At school, she has very few friends, is well behaved and appears on the quiet side. She lives alone with her mother who works full time to financially support the family. Her father, a drifter, died several years ago of liver disease. After attending school and track practice, Amanda usually spends several hours alone until her mother arrives from work at 6 PM. Amanda rarely uses the phone to converse nor does she spend time with her social acquaintances. She has recently been coping with her sexual identity. She is an isolated youngster with only electronic devices to provide her with human contact. She occupies her time by using her computer to search websites, play games, complete homework, and email people she does not readily feel comfortable approaching. As Amanda's sexual feelings emerged, she is faced with much confusion. She wants to have stronger connections with other girls. She has confusion over her emerging sexual thoughts and feelings. So Amanda, through her e-mail, finds a handle or name in which she will not be recognized. She contacts the email addresses of Emily, a fellow student at her school. Posing as a boy, she attempts to work out a relationship. As John, she is able to express her crush for Emily. As John, she knows many aspects of Emily's life. As John, she suggests that they meet each other. From Emily's viewpoint, she believes that

John is stalking her. As their conversations continue, Emily is concerned that John is an adult who might harm her. Emily and her parents finally contact the local authorities. Amanda is then accused of engaging in illegal sexual communications on the Internet. What appears to be a harmless, teenage communication turns into a very serious problem for those involved.

Case 9. These fraudulent sexually explicit Internet communications can also lead to federal criminal charges with serious legal consequences. One family recently spent over \$75,000 dollars to keep their college student from spending over five years in prison because of his sexually oriented interstate communications with a female minor. This student thought that his E-Mail lover was a female college coed residing at an East Coast college. While visiting his e-mail romantic connection, they eventually had sex. Unfortunately, his sexual companion was a minor. He received a penitentiary sentence for this sexual misconduct with a minor.

Case 10. Benny is a shy, quiet well-behaved sixteen-year-old high school student. He lives with his divorcee mother who works to support the family. This adolescent has always felt self-conscious in his relationships with others, especially his peers. To his relief, he finds that he can make connections with others and spends several hours daily interacting with others in the chat rooms. He establishes several relationships, one of which is with a boy, Adam who claims that he is sixteen -years old. As they communicate over several weeks, they find that they have mutual interests and have shared intimate feelings. Adam encourages Benny to meet him and develop a sexual relationship. As Benny finds out later, Adam is an adult, a registered sexual offender, who is seeking victims through the Internet. Benny was horrified by this discovery and is currently dealing with the aftermath of this experience in therapy.

Are the Sexual Attitudes of Minors Being Significantly Compromised by Cybersex?

Parents, clinicians, educators and concerned citizens need to better understand what impact these readily available graphic sexual materials, live sexual acts and chat room romances will have upon minors and their future sexual development. It is quite plausible that both minors and adults could be exposed to graphic materials that may 1) fuel a sexual addiction, 2) compromise their judgment, and 3) encourage harmful and inconsiderate sexual acts. If these materials promote criminal sexual behavior, the impact of Porno.com is quite staggering. For example, in the state of Oregon, an adolescent sexual offender whose behavior was highly influenced by Internet materials can spend a period of six to ten years incarcerated. In the state of Arizona, just the possession of child pornography by a minor under age sixteen can lead to long-term incarceration. These detrimental effects may have many negative consequences for youth including heightened sexual arousal and curiosity, deviant sexual arousal preferences and patterns, sexual addictions and criminal sexual behavior.

Is there such a thing as harmless sexual exposure to children and minors on the Internet? This question needs to be carefully researched. As data is being collected, it is time to

encourage parents, educators and guardians to ensure that appropriate firewalls and security systems prohibit their children from accessing these sexually explicit materials. Although some communities are rightfully enraged over massage parlors, prostitution, drug dealers and other asocial concerns; a more lethal weapon may be found in each individual's home, office and public library. Immediate access to the Internet, to an array of visual sexual materials, chat rooms and other paraphernalia may be extremely dangerous to the health and welfare of our children.

In order to protect your child from Internet pornography, the following steps are recommended:

1. Find a knowledgeable source that knows how your computer operates. Find out what your children have been watching.
2. Check your phone bill carefully for unknown charges.
3. Check your credit card for unauthorized credit card calls or charges.
4. Check your child's room in order to determine whether there are hidden videotapes, magazines or other sexual paraphernalia.
5. Look for changes in sexual behavior or interests
6. Be concerned if your child is awake at unusual hours talking on the phone, viewing television, or using the computer.
7. Be concerned if your child quickly shut off the computer when you enter the room.
8. Have family discussions about Internet viewing, computer interests, and the uses and misuses of electronic devices.
9. Find out if your children have access to pornography and/ or inappropriate Internet sites at their friends' home.
10. Install security or firewall programs that make access to Internet sites almost impossible.
11. Let your children and their friends know that Big Brother is watching. As parents, you will be monitoring their computer use, TV viewing habits, movie selections, and music interests.
12. If all fails, disconnect your computer and your television set! Silence is golden! Enjoy a meaningful conversation with your children. They maybe tired of all of this hype.

If your child has had a sexual experience with an adult Internet acquaintance, pursue a medical examination including a screening for venereal diseases, along with counseling from an expert knowledgeable about child and adolescent sexuality. Report the predator to the local authorities.

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