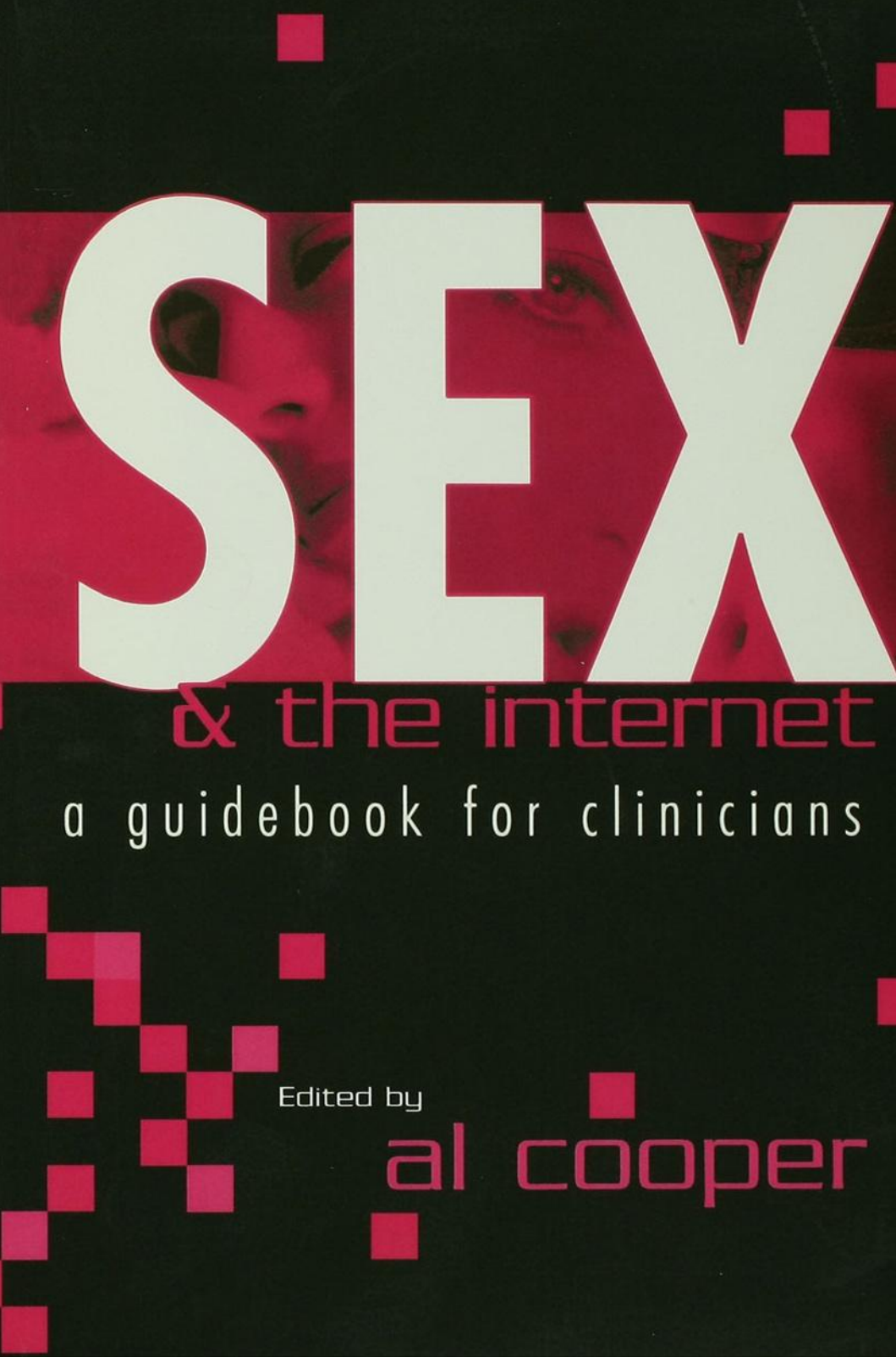
SEX
& the internet
a guidebook for clinicians
Edited by
al cooper

# SEX AND THE INTERNET

# SEX AND THE INTERNET:

## A Guidebook for Clinicians

*Edited by*

**Al Cooper**

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# FOREWORD

The Internet is here to stay, and in the future it will most probably be much more widely used for psychological and clinical education than it is at the present time. The Internet is already used to disseminate a considerable amount of mental health information, to provide psychotherapy, and as an adjunct to more traditional forms of psychotherapy. I predict that this trend will steadily increase in the coming years. At the psychological clinic of the Albert Ellis Institute in New York, we have started using the Internet for personal sessions of rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) with both American and international clients. We have found this type of usage to be so effective that we will soon expand it considerably.

Sex, relationships, and family involvement on the Internet has greatly widened in recent years, and will most probably continue to do so. This kind of participation has its problems and dangers, as shown in some of the chapters in this book. But it also has distinct advantages for communication that are not readily available through other media. Both private and public presentations in these areas provide fascinating alternatives to other means of communicating.

In *Sex and the Internet: A Guidebook for Clinicians,* Al Cooper and his collaborators present a wealth of relevant material about the Internet's facilitation of sex, relationships, and family matters. The various chapters describe the Internet's present coverage in these areas, as well as its future possibilities. They include a surprising amount of enlightening material that has not previously been available in book form. Readers will gain unusual knowledge of the Internet itself and how it can beneficially be adapted to dealing with significant sexual and relationship issues. Read it and enjoy!

—Albert Ellis, Ph.D.

# PREFACE

One of the most fundamental conclusions from Alfred Kinsey's research of more than 50 years ago was that human sexuality is extraordinarily variable in its expression. Basic biological mechanisms interact with a variety of sociocultural factors to shape a bewildering array of patterns of sexual response. This interaction between biology and culture is poorly understood, but the capacity to associate sexual response with diverse stimuli, based on the principles of learning, is fundamental, and sociocultural influences can both encourage and discourage, intentionally or unintentionally, what stimuli are involved.

When we consider the society that Kinsey studied, we can see how easily sexual expression was distorted by socially driven guilt and anxiety and by the social promotion of sexual stereotypes, fostering problematic power relationships between men and women and ostracizing those with unconventional sexual values. The negative consequences, to both the individual and society, were plain to see. But have we been moving toward a better socially determined pattern of sexuality since Kinsey's time? That is also questionable. The past 50 years have seen social change at a rate and extent unprecedented in history. A number of changes that are clearly to be welcomed have combined with other changes of less certain advantage to impact sexuality at the end of the 20th century, and we enter the 21st century far from certain where we are heading.

One fundamental part of this changing picture has been called the "triumph of the individual over society" (Hobsbawm, 1997). People have increasingly been giving their own individual welfare and personal development top priority in their lives. Primary allegiance to the family is becoming a thing of the past. While traditional marriage has been taking a beating, at least as a long-term commitment, we have seen the impact of the women's movement on the structuring and negotiating of what have been called "pure" relationships. The *pure* here has nothing to do with virtue, but rather the idea that it is a relationship for its own sake, not as part of an institution such as marriage, and not for outward, material, or official reasons. Such a relationship may be heterosexual or homosexual. It lasts as long as both partners are satisfied with the personal

bonus it provides. It is therefore, by nature, of uncertain duration and often short-lived. It reflects each individual's commitment to his or her own personal growth and well-being as well as a negotiated, and hence more equitable, way of relating to one another. Within such relationships we can see how sex can contribute to intimacy, serving to bond the relationship if it works well, weakening it if it does not.

But for some, particularly men, the sexuality of this type of pure relationship is emotionally demanding, more so than in more traditional relationships of the past. Increasingly, especially for those who have relatively high needs for sexual outlet, sex is, at least partially, being separated off from the relationship. Most commonly this involves masturbation. Schmidt (1998) described a young man who came to his clinic because he didn't feel like having sex with his girlfriend but was an enthusiastic masturbator. The man summed it up as follows: "If I masturbate I can start when I like, come when I like and stop when I like; I needn't bother with foreplay, or romantic lighting, or tender nothings murmured in her ear; I don't have to guess what she might like; or discuss afterwards how it was; I can go to sleep when I feel like it" (p. 232)—a somewhat depressing account for the romantics among us. But apparently this is an increasing trend, at least in part. Masturbation is the simplest and least problematic way of separating sex from relationships. There are, of course, others, and always have been. Prostitution and various ways of "cheating" on one's partner have a long history, but in recent years there has been an explosion of other alternatives, such as telephone sex and now the Internet.

The Internet presents us with the latest and, in many respects most powerful form of new technology to impact on sexuality. In the nineteenth century one of the earliest uses of the new daguerreotype technology was to capture sexually explicit images. We have many examples of early photography of this kind in the Kinsey Institute. Whereas initially such images were available to relatively few people, the accessibility of erotic images produced by these emerging technologies has gradually widened. We now have many examples of early stag films and their subsequent developments, and we have many sexually explicit videos. Videos brought much wider accessibility. Over the relatively short history of the erotic video, we see some striking changes. Whereas in the 1970s many such videos told erotic stories, those of the last decade of the 20th century were often zoomed in to genital sexuality with minimum delay. Our impression is that the earlier videos were used more by couples, for whom the erotic contact would impact the sexual relationship. By contrast, later videos seem more designed for the individual viewer, presumably male, who is pursuing the uncomplicated, uninvolved release of masturbatory sexual pleasure. As if to compensate for this change, we have seen the development of erotic videos designed for women, by

women, where the erotic story regains importance. The technology and the accessibility were probably not responsible for the "triumph of the individual," but they undoubtedly fostered it.

With the arrival of the Internet, we take a huge leap into a comparable but much, much more complex arena, where at best we can only speculate about possible consequences. The "individual" has enormously expanded possibilities. This can work in various ways. First, he or she can find an endless array of images. The ability to select those that are particularly stimulating may serve to reinforce a particular preference, which then has the potential for becoming a "late onset fetish." The user may even find that the emerging fetish has its own Web site, indicating that there are others who share it. This "identification with subculture" may further reinforce the fetish pattern. The unending availability of new or different images may in some way reinforce a "rapid habituation" pattern so that before long, old or repeated images rapidly lose their effect. We were recently confronted with this possibility at the Kinsey Institute in our ongoing psycho-physiological studies. We started to encounter a high proportion of "flat responders," who simply didn't find any of our images stimulating. Neither Erick Janssen nor I, both of whom had been involved in such psycho-physiological studies over quite a few years, had ever encountered such a high rate of nonresponse. This led us to revise the protocol so that subjects could choose from a menu of possibilities. This is working, and may well reflect what is happening when people use the Internet for erotic stimulation.

But the individual can experiment with relationships as well. Chat rooms are adding a fundamentally new dimension to our experience of relationships. We can be stimulated by the interactive process, remaining sublimely unaware of the physical and other realities of the people involved. We can even confront the realities and meet up with them in "real space" offline. Though we can see how some individuals may actually learn to improve their social skills online, others may slip from online to offline into highly risky sexual situations.

Given the formidable potential for learning varied sexual response patterns, it is difficult to avoid feeling bewildered by the range of possibilities that the Internet makes available. In most respects we are considering "double-edged swords." For example, the same possibilities that lead to someone discovering the erotic potential of autoerotic asphyxia, to take an extreme example, may also lead people, engaging in this practice, to communicate with others about it. In this particular case, I am alarmed at the prospect of this highly dangerous sexual behavior spreading, but at the same time I'm encouraged by the possibility that for the first time we might be able to increase our understanding of it by actually communi-

cating with its proponents, which was not hitherto possible because they are usually dead before we find out about it.

The benefits of "special information," much of which is consumer rather than provider driven, are already very apparent. People with minority interests can make contact with each other and share the information that is important for their futures.

And should we assume that the Internet will continue to be uncontrollable? While we tend to be suspicious of social control, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that for any society, control of sex is necessary to some extent. There is, of course, good and bad control. Attempts are currently underway to gain control, both legal and political, over what is happening sexually on the Internet. Let us hope that such control, if gained, will be to our general advantage and will not repeat the old cycles of liberation and suppression that pervade the history of sexuality.

As the foregoing indicates, we are just starting to grapple with many crucial issues, so this book comes at an important time.

—John Bancroft, M.D.
Kinsey Institute

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Editing a book is a monumental undertaking. As with both sex and being online, it is better to do it with others than by yourself. This book is the result of both direct and indirect contributions from many different people whom I want to acknowledge and thank.

Of course, there would be no book without the hard work of the various dedicated and talented authors who wrote the 14 chapters and introductory material, as well as Tim Julet, Jill Osowa, and George Zimmar from Brunner-Routledge who encouraged me to undertake this endeavor and then guided me through the process. In addition, valuable input and fine tuning was provided by my friend and colleague, Coralie Scherer, and the other 14 voluntary reviewers who read their respective chapters.

Behind the scenes were my colleagues at the San Jose Marital and Sexuality Centre and at the Counseling and Psychological Services, Cowell Health Services of Stanford University. These people are the ones who gave me daily support through my 9 to 5 life, while I crammed work on the book into evenings and weekends. My primary supports were also there for me in direct and indirect ways—Fred, Lynne, Greg, Andy, and Ulrike. They listened to my complaining and encouraged me during the times I felt overwhelmed and fearful that the book would never be done. More importantly, they helped me to intermittently escape the computer so that I might have another dimension to my life beyond work.

Finally, at the risk of sounding somewhat strange, I want to specifically acknowledge the many imaginative visionaries and technical grunts whose minds and efforts have brought us the Internet itself. Without this new medium for human communication there would be no topic for this book. In addition, without the Internet I would not have been able to practically manage the numerous tasks involved with this project: exchanging drafts, coordinating and updating authors, finding reviewers and providing them with chapter drafts, and seeking guidance for the unexpected developments inherent in the process. How did people handle the complexities of editing a book before the Internet, even 10 years ago? What will life be like in the next iteration of the Internet 10 years from now? Hmm, now that will be a book.

Al Cooper
Eric Griffin-Shelley

# Introduction. The Internet: The Next Sexual Revolution

A new sexual revolution has commenced with the staggering growth of computers and technology and the exponential expansion of the Internet. While some individuals recognize the profound social changes swirling around the Internet, most are just beginning to grasp both the promise and peril that it brings regarding a host of issues concerning human relationships.

The focus of this book is sexuality and the Internet. In it, we explore the major issues that clinicians, mental health professionals, and society's leaders need to know about the impact of Internet sexuality on their work with clients, families, and society at large. The contributors—researchers and clinicians—review the most current empirical data and provide accurate and in-depth information and analysis designed to update general understanding as well as clinical practice. Internet sexuality already reflects the conflicts around sexual issues that are pervasive throughout our culture, for example, the tension between freedom of expression and the protection of children. By becoming informed and engaged, clinicians can treat problems and answer questions arising from Internet sexual activity. Armed with knowledge, mental health practitioners can be proactive in shaping the future of the new sexual revolution.

## ☐ Understanding Sexuality

Love and sex are essential to human life, and therefore integral to clinical work. Generally, people are more open about their romantic lives than about the details of their sexual lives. Consequently, our understanding of human sexuality has been more limited than our knowledge of interpersonal relationships. The available objective information about sex and love pales in comparison with scientific knowledge in other areas of health. Sexuality remains rather hidden and, for some, stigmatized and shame-filled. As a consequence, research on human sexuality is inadequately funded. In contrast, AIDS, cancer, mental illness, and chemical dependency all suffer from similar negative perceptions, but over the past three decades, each of these areas has received gradually increasing public and governmental recognition and support. Science rockets ahead in the understanding of the human genome and how to extend life past the century mark, yet we lag far behind in our science and understanding of human sexuality, particularly the nonbiological aspects (Donahey & Miller, 2001).

## ☐ Sexual Revolution

A new sexual revolution has begun with the explosion of electronic technology, computers, and especially the recent, rapid expansion of the Internet, also known as the World Wide Web, "the Net" or "the Web." As we move into the information age, it is clear that the world is irretrievably changing. Jerome et al. (2000) asserted that "rapid and far-reaching technological advances are revolutionizing the ways in which people relate, communicate, and live their daily lives." They went on to say that "increased access to information and individuals will fundamentally alter the way people see the world, establish communities, and work within these structures" (p. 407). Most people acknowledge that these profound changes are occurring, but the social implications and effects on members of the global community are poorly understood, at best. One thing that is known is that sex has been a major factor in the development of, activity on, and interest in the Internet (Cooper, 1997; Cooper, Boies, Maheu, & Greenfield, 1999).

## ☐ Staggering Growth

Most people are only marginally aware of how the Internet is changing every facet of our lives, probably more dramatically in the next 20 years

than in any previous period in history (Cooper et al., 1999). A recent composite profile reveals that about 167 million people in the United States use the World Wide Web. Of those, the average visitor logs on three times, visits an average of five sites, and spends a little over three hours per week online (Nielsen NetRatings, 2001). In October 2000, the U.S. Department of Commerce published the fourth report in a series entitled, *Falling Through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion.* They indicated that "more that half of all households (51.0%) have computers, up from 42.1% in December, 1998" (Department of Commerce, 2000). In addition "there were 116.5 million Americans online at some location in August 2000, 31.9 million more than there were only 20 months earlier" (DOC, 2000). The information and opportunities available on the Internet are exploding, with over 1 billion unique pages available in January, 2000 (Inktomi, 2000).

The rate of growth for new Internet service is estimated to be a meteoric 25% every 3 months. New developments in the merging of once separate telephone, television, and computer technologies, a phenomenon known as *convergence,* are being introduced daily. Work, school, and even social activities are becoming increasingly dependent upon, and centered around, computers (Cooper, 1997). Ten years ago most people could not even imagine the concept of online chatting or shopping. How quickly people adapt to and take for granted that which was science fiction just moments before!

## Definitions

In order to better describe and study this phenomenon, we need a common lexicon. Thus, for the purposes of this text, *online sexual activity* (OSA) is defined as use of the Internet for any activity (including text, audio, graphic files) that involves sexuality for purposes of recreation, entertainment, exploration, support, education, commerce, efforts to attain and secure sexual or romantic partners, and so on.

*Cybersex* is a subcategory of OSA and can be defined as using the medium of the Internet to engage in sexually gratifying activities, such as looking at pictures, participating in sexual chat, exchanging explicit sexual images or emails, *"cybering"* (i.e., sharing fantasies over the Internet that involve being sexual together while one or both people masturbate), and so on.

*Online sexual problems* (OSPs) include the full range of difficulties that people can have due to engaging in OSA. Such difficulties include negative financial, legal, occupational, relationship, and personal repercussions from OSA. The "problem" may range from a single incident to a

pattern of excessive involvement. The consequences may involve feelings of guilt, loss of a job or relationship, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), etc.

Finally, *online sexual compulsivity* (OSC) is a subtype of OSP and refers to excessive OSA behaviors that interfere with the work, social, and/or recreational dimensions of the person's life. In addition, there are other indications of the "loss of control" of their ability to regulate the activity and/or minimize adverse consequences (Cooper, 1998b).

## ☐ The Internet and Sexuality

Since its inception, the Internet has been inextricably associated with sexuality in a synergistic dance, each fueling and ultimately contributing to the transformation of the other. That people are fascinated with sexuality and sexual relationships is clearly manifested on the Internet. An estimated 20% of Internet users engage in some form of OSA (Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2000). Sexual pursuits may account for almost 70% of all dollars spent online (Sprenger, 1999). One report indicated that 18 million people in the United States accessed pornography sites in the year 2000, a figure that is three times higher than for 1999 (Carr, 2000). Yet, even as the Web continues its exponential expansion, little is known about how this new medium is affecting sexuality in the United States and around the world. It might be helpful to begin this discussion by providing a little more information on the more general impact of the Net.

## ☐ The Internet: Connecting or Dividing?

Will the Internet ultimately unite people or divide them by who is "online" and who is not? Will the gaps between generations, income levels, cultures, or countries become even wider? There are already disparities between children and teenagers who have "grown up with" computers and the many adults who lack even basic familiarity with the online world. Will this add to the generation gap or will technology render innovative ways for our younger and older people to "connect"? Similarly, the affluent, not surprisingly, have easier access to the Internet than do the poor (Jerome et al., 2000). However, the U.S. Department of Commerce (2000) recently reported that "groups that have traditionally been digital 'have nots' are now making dramatic gains." Perhaps Internet accessibility will some day help to decrease social and economic divisions.

Geographic distribution of online users is uneven. Currently the United States has the greatest number of people online, with Japan (31.9 mil-

lion), Germany (27.1 million), the United Kingdom (23.4 million), Italy (18.1 million), Canada (13.2 million), and Australia (9.2 million) following in succession (Nielson NetRatings, 2001). The Nua Web site reports 407 million online users worldwide, with 167 million in the United States and Canada, 113 million in Europe, 104 million in Asia and the Pacific, 16 million in Latin America, 3 million in Africa, and 2 million in the Middle East (Nua, 2001). Although the Nua and NetRatings methods of tallying differ, both sets of figures indicate that the online world is primarily English speaking and that large portions of the world are still unconnected. Yet, even without direct access, the effects of the Internet are being felt around the world and providing opportunities for those who know how to make use of them.

Meeting and communicating with people is no longer limited by propinquity or even time of day (Cooper & Sportolari, 1997). The interpersonal cues so often relied on in face to face interactions are generally not available online. Cybercommunication is still overwhelmingly text-based, so that variables such as age, gender, physical appearance, race, or disability, which are typically subject to visual and auditory verification, are less important online. On one hand, ambiguity is increased, but on the other, the Internet can be a means to reducing interpersonal barriers, overcoming common stereotypes and prejudices, disseminating information, as well as increasing variety in relationships, both sexual and nonsexual.

## ☐ The Internet Is Powered by the "Triple A Engine"

Computers speed things up. With regard to sexuality, this shift in speed evokes intense emotional reactions. For instance, flirtation and innuendo, long the staples of leisurely seduction, can rapidly escalate into frank sexual discussions and proposals on the Internet. The changes in speed and intensity of sexual encounters online are without precedent. Cooper (1997) stated that the three central components that combine to turbocharge, that is, accelerate and intensify, OSA include access, affordability, and anonymity. These three components are referred to collectively as the "Triple A Engine."

### Access

The Internet is available, convenient, and easily accessed by increasing numbers of people worldwide. They log on from their homes, schools, and places of work or leisure. Accessibility has contributed to sex becoming one of the most commonly searched topics on the Internet (All Knight

Systems, 1999; Cooper, 1998a; Freeman-Longo & Blanchard, 1998) and to its widespread use for sexual pursuits (Goldberg, 1998). People can find a Web site to satisfy any sexual need or desire they may have without the need to delay gratification. Consumerism is further facilitated by the ready availability of products, services, and people (Fisher & Barak, 2000). The Internet is a virtual store open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for social and business transactions.

### Affordability

Affordability is based on the economic principle of supply and demand. The seemingly infinite number of sites and products means that the supply is plentiful, and this increased competition, when combined with a lower overhead than a "bricks and mortar" business, leads to lower prices for consumers. This is particularly true for those sexual items and experiences that are less easily available in real time, such as sado/masochistic (S/M) dating services or a sexual enhancement workshop for lesbians. With improvements in search engines, the Internet serves as a central clearinghouse that keeps time and costs in check. Consumers who know their way around the Net can easily find free sexuality-related items and services (Hapgood, 1996). Additionally, the declining costs of server space and increased revenue from banner and link advertising helps keep user fees low.

### Anonymity

The belief, whether true or not, that one's identity is concealed online can have a powerful effect on sexual expression. Branwyn (1993) observed that use of the Internet increases the sense of freedom, willingness to experiment, and pace of self-disclosure, as well as enhancing a person's ability to talk openly about their sexual questions, concerns, and fantasies. For example, those who might be hesitant to purchase sexually explicit materials, products, or aids in a face to face encounter may be more comfortable doing so when protected by the anonymity they feel online.

## ☐ The Internet and Telehealth: A Tool for Health Promotion

As a communication tool, the Internet offers a means of promoting physical and mental health, especially sexual health, through innovative meth-

ods. For example, it is becoming a common practice for health professionals to use video-conferencing as a means to provide patients in rural clinics with access to specialists in other geographic locations (Jerome et al., 2000). Online mental health services currently maintain educational Web sites that include diagnostic questionnaires, interactive bulletin boards, support groups and chat rooms. Hospitals, insurance companies, and other healthcare organizations are developing ways to communicate with and offer services to their customer base via the Internet.

As people increasingly turn to the Internet for health information and support, it is important that they bear in mind that technology can be misused. Some Web sites are filled with inaccurate information and biased points of view. Incompetent and unscrupulous people motivated by greed and self-interest exist online as well as off. As both the benefits and risks of the cyberworld are more fully understood, people will be better able to navigate it safely.

Offerings of online counseling and psychotherapies are proliferating, yet remain controversial. Internet-mediated psychotherapy cannot be adequately dealt with in this book because of the complexities surrounding it at present. Most likely, the ethical, legal, and technical concerns will be worked out in the next few years, and in future texts one can expect this area to have a chapter of its own.

## ☐ Commercial, Positive, and Negative Aspects of Internet Sexuality

Cooper (1998a) noted that the use of the Internet for sexual purposes can be classified in three broad categories: commercial aspects, positive connections, and negative patterns.

### Commercial Aspects

Sexuality has long been a significant financial engine driving the growth of the Internet (Hapgood, 1996). The profits generated by sexual commerce have funded major online technological advances that have been quickly adopted by mainstream businesses. Analyst Mark Hardie of Forrester Research is quoted as saying,

> What I see when I look at this industry [online adult sites]—putting aside any moral judgments about reprehensible content—is an amazing example of an industry that has banded together to protect its business, push revenue across the industry, and innovate cutting-edge technologies. (Branwyn, 1999)

Sex sites routinely make money, a still unusual status among businesses in the contemporary world of e-commerce. Given that less than 1% of visitors to adult sites actually spend money on them (Branwyn, 1999), these businesses need to attract and retain large numbers of visitors in order to make a profit. The number of individual visitors at such sites grew more than 27% from December 1999 to February 2001, to nearly 28 million from 22 million (Schwartz, 2001). The Internet has become a very common pathway to explore and engage in sexual activity, particularly for persons and cultures for whom sex and sexuality is a source of shame and embarrassment (Cooper, McLoughlin, & Campbell, 2000). In addition to products, the Internet has also become another medium for marketing romance and sex, from dating services and personal ads to the popular sexual chat rooms. There are a multitude of ways to "meet interesting people" online. Those with an enterprising spirit have found ways to collect fees from those who participate in these activities, Internet-savvy sex workers find search engines and Web sites to be excellent venues for advertising their services (Cooper et al., 1999).

## Positive Potential

In a world fraught with sexual problems, pitfalls, and prejudices, the Internet offers many ways to positively impact sexuality and sexual connections between people. One trend is the proliferation of virtual communities around common sexual interests, whether they be pro-choice or pro-life advocates, "leather aficionados," or those with shared sexual life concerns, such as rape survivors, herpes sufferers, or paraplegics. The sense of community and belonging derived from such contacts can have important and salubrious psychological effects on individuals and contribute to the changing political and social perceptions of these groups. Isolated and disenfranchised individuals, such as gay and lesbian youth, ethnic minorities, or persons with disabilities, can come together online and find social support that may not otherwise be available to them. Professionals are recognizing that these virtual communities impact peoples' lives significantly and are increasing their efforts to study and understand them (Burke, 2000; Palandri & Green, 2000).

Another important development is the rapid increase in the number of specific Web sites that educate people about such sexual matters as sexual dysfunction, sexual enhancement techniques, safer sex practices, reproduction, abstinence, and sexually transmitted disease. The lack of factual information is a major contributor to the enormous amount of fear and anxiety many feel about sexuality (Williams, 1994). In response, a wide

range of sites has been developed to provide sexual education in the form of Web sites with frequently asked questions lists (FAQs), advice columns, and discussion groups, and e-mail distribution lists for cutting edge news and information.

In particular, the Internet may offer an alternative way to provide sexual education and interventions for our young people. If used effectively, it may be able to positively influence their perceptions about sexual matters via fresh, hip, accurate, and informative Web sites that combine entertainment, education, and meaningful discussions of sexual values in ways that attract and hold their interest. Similarly, professionals are finding that the Internet can help them stay informed and abreast of relevant developments in their respective fields. Sexual education materials are increasingly available through major sexuality organizations, such as the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapist's Web site (www.aasect.org) or that of the National Council on Sex Addiction and Compulsivity (www.ncsac.org). These organizations have their own Web sites available to the public as well as to their members. Additional Internet-based methods of informing and educating professionals include improved online continuing education courses; e-mail lists, which encourage the exchange of views on current and controversial issues; and bulletin boards (BBs), which promote posting recent research findings, questions, and comments among members.

## Negative Effects and Risks

The Internet is not without its risks. In addition to expanding knowledge and providing support, the Internet can negatively impact people's lives and their sexuality. Clinicians are reporting a dramatic increase in the number of patients with issues related to their OSA. For many of these clients, the Internet has become an outlet for unresolved sexual difficulties and unfocused sexual energy, including the acting out or repetition of traumatic experiences (Schwartz & Southern, 2000). Some individuals who go online for their social and sexual needs forsake, avoid, or neglect real-world relationships (Kraut et al., 1998; Greenfield, 1999). Others find enough solace in their online lives that they lose the motivation to address dissatisfactions in their offline lives and, therefore, neither address nor resolve them. OSA is particularly tempting for those who already experience problems with sexual compulsivity, as well as those who are psychologically predisposed or vulnerable to act out compulsively (Leiblum, 1997). It is easy to see how many might choose to hide from their real-world problems through increased or exclusive online interaction.

## ☐ Contributors and Chapter Summaries

The contributors to this volume provide in-depth examinations of various trends that individual clinicians may have difficulty keeping up with by themselves. The authors represent a diversity and richness of perspectives and viewpoints, much like the Web itself. They include a collection of North American and international experts in various areas of sexuality from prestigious universities, private foundations, clinics, and world-renowned hospitals. They represent diverse disciplines, including public health, medicine, law, psychology, and psychiatry. Each has been selected because of his or her knowledge of some unique dimension of Internet sexuality, and we believe their contributions combine to provide a comprehensive foundation for anyone interested in the area of online sexuality.

The book begins with a foreword and preface by two of the pioneers in the field of sexuality, Albert Ellis and John Bancroft of the Kinsey Institute. They talk about the profound impact the Internet is having on the area of sexuality and help to provide some historical context.

### Part 1: Populations of Concern

The five chapters of Part I deal with populations of concern and how they are being influenced by online sexuality. Sandra Leiblum and Nicola Döering begin by examining the growing presence of women on the Internet. Then Michael Ross and Michael Kauth explore the role of the Internet for men who have sex with men. Following that, Mitchell Tepper and Annette Owens examine how the Internet impacts persons with disabilities, chronic illnesses, and normal lifecycle changes (e.g., puberty, pregnancy, menopause, and aging). The section ends with an important discussion by Robert Longo, Steven Brown, and Deborah Orcutt, who look at the impact of online sexuality on our children and adolescents.

### Part II: Cybersex Problems: Therapeutic Considerations

The next part begins with an exploration of the complex issues of virtual sexuality in the workplace by Al Cooper, Irene McLoughlin, Pauline Reich and Jay Kent-Ferraro. This is followed by David Greenfield and Maressa Orzack offering an overview of assessment issues pertaining to OSPs. Following that chapter, David L. Delmonico, Elizabeth Griffin, and Patrick J. Carnes discuss treatment strategies for OSPs. Next, Jennifer Schneider focuses specifically on the concerns of partners and family members of those with OSPs and examines these issues in the context of cyberspace.

Finally, Nathan Galbreath, Fred Berlin, and Denise Sawyer describe some of the most severe types of OSPs and the increasing popularity of the Internet as a venue for those with a variety of paraphilic interests.

### Part III: Other Areas of Special Interest

Starting this final part, Al Cooper, Coralie Scherer, and David Marcus suggest practical ways for clinicians to use the Internet as an adjunct to more traditional therapeutic interventions used to improve sexual relationships. Next, Michael Plaut and Karen Donahey examine how the anarchy of the early Internet is being transformed into a kinder, gentler place where "netiquette" is enforced by Internet service providers' (ISPs) policies, ethical guidelines, and laws and regulations. Eric Ochs, Kenneth Mah, and Yitzchak Binik then outline the opportunities for important new research on human sexuality offered by the Internet.

The book concludes with a chapter by Azy Barak and William Fisher, who offer their thoughts about the future of Internet sexuality. Their projections about future trends will enable clinicians to be on the forefront of these developments.

## ☐ Limitations

While this volume attempts to be comprehensive, the field is newly emerging and evolving, and thus, there remain areas that are not adequately represented and still need further professional investigation. For instance, though lesbian involvement with the Net is mentioned in several chapters, a more in-depth exploration of the topic, as well as more empirical data, is needed. In addition, most current research bases its models of Internet sexuality primarily on the presumption that it takes the same form everywhere that it takes in the United States. This may or may not be true, and OSA in this country may be similar to, or vastly different from, its manifestations in other parts of the world (or even in different ethnic or cultural subgroups within the United States). At present, there are many more questions than answers.

## ☐ Professionals, Prevention, and Policies: A Call for Action

Rather than react to events as they unfold, professionals have the option to forge ahead, using their knowledge and training to proactively develop

the content, use, and evolution of OSAs. Informed professionals can facilitate the appropriate use of the Internet for sexual health while attempting to minimize potential problems and adverse effects.

There is an immediate need for more attention to the impact on sexuality of this rapidly developing technology. Mental health professionals need to go online and study online behaviors in schools, homes, businesses, libraries, and cafes. They can partner with other interested individuals and organizations, such as school administrators, educators, parents, employers, law enforcement agencies, and representatives of local, state, and national governments, to develop strategies to deal with Internet sexuality concerns.

To this end, it is recommended that the following policies and interventions be considered:

1. Develop programs to educate the public about the potential for positive effects that the Internet can have on sexuality and public health, such as
   - the development of healthy sexual self-esteem and behaviors;
   - the correction of misinformation about sexuality and relationships;
   - the development of sex-positive virtual communities for minority and disenfranchised populations;
   - the offering of first-line interventions for persons struggling with issues they are not yet ready to acknowledge offline, such as sexual orientation, survival of sexual abuse or assault, "embarrassing" and anomalous sexual and somatic concerns, or affairs or domestic violence.

   Implementation of these goals via the Internet has the potential to lead to an increase in medical and emotional help-seeking behaviors with concomitant decreases in STDs, unwanted pregnancies, depression, suicide, or divorce.
2. Post warnings and criteria about potential negative effects of going online for sexual pursuits, for example, "spending more than 10 hours per week or using OSA to relieve stress is likely to be problematic" (Cooper, Griffin-Shelley, Delmonico, & Mathy, 2001). These could be placed in appropriate places by ISPs and providers of online adult entertainment, along with hyperlinks and invitations to visit other Web sites, such as the American Psychological Association, the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, or the National Council of Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity, where OSAs, treatments, and related issues would be addressed in more detail.
3. Develop and implement programs to educate the public about those who are "at risk" for developing OSPs and OSC. It would be useful to provide "markers" for individuals to assess whether their particular

behaviors might leave them vulnerable to more serious problems or not (Cooper et al., 2001).

At the same time as these larger changes are happening, mental health professionals can become directly involved in acquiring and disseminating accurate, ethically rendered, accessible information that is specifically tailored to targeted sexual communities, such as in the following ways.

1. Becoming familiar with the Internet, visiting sexuality-related Web sites, and incorporating Web-based interventions in their practices.
2. Creating Web sites (or pages within a Web site) expressly designed for a single sexuality issue. Such sites would include FAQs, screening questionnaires, self-help tests, or interactive behavioral treatment and educational modules, including accurate and ethical online movies and animations, that address the specific sexual concern.
3. Becoming expert moderators for scheduled interactive online chats or monitors of sexuality-focused BBs.
4. Developing sites for other mental health professionals, independently or through professional organizations, which encourage collegial support, consultation, and continuing education. Such sites would include targeted news items and announcements, links to resources, e-mail lists, BBs, or other forums for the exchange of ideas, new research, and resources.
5. Expanding our understanding of Internet sexuality through empirical research. By writing articles and book chapters, presenting at conferences, soliciting funding for research, and developing viable theories about these issues, professionals will become increasingly aware of the effects of OSA and develop effective and innovative interventions.

By being involved in these cutting edge activities, mental health professionals can have a presence on the Internet and other forms of telehealth and shape this emerging and central influence on sexuality in the 21st century. However, concerned professionals will only have a voice in these developments if they are informed, active, and contributing. Reading this book will help you to be more informed. As for becoming active and contributing, that part is up to you!

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