

Sex Before Marriage Rewires Your Brain

In our culture today, we've come to believe that sex is love—and good sex is good love. In her new bestseller *Love Sense*, Dr. Sue Johnson warns: "Vaulting sex to such primacy has, alas, distorted its role in relationships—and with harming consequences. Instead of drawing people closer together, all the emphasis on sex is instead driving us farther and farther apart. We're abandoning living partners for screen sex."

Today, 68 percent of Christian men watch porn and according to a recent survey by Covenant Eyes, about half (49 percent) of young adult women in the study agree that viewing pornography is an acceptable way of expressing one's sexuality. What are these statistics telling us about the way we look at sex?

Three Sexual Attachment Styles

For over a decade, there have been numerous studies that reveal three different attachment styles in the way people bond sexually: secure, anxious and avoidant. The latter is what's interesting as it reflects the behavior we see in the statistics above.

According to Dr. Johnson: "Those of us who are avoidant, that is, uncomfortable with emotional closeness and dependence on others, are more likely to have what I term "sealed-off sex." Sex is self-centered and self-affirming, a performance aimed at achieving climax and confirming one's own sexual skill. Technique is prized; openness and vulnerability shunned. There is little foreplay, such as kissing or tender touching. And no cuddling afterward—once the Big Bang occurs, there's nothing left ... Because pleasure without emotional engagement is shallow and fleeting, this kind of sex needs continual

boosting to be thrilling.”

Understanding the Sexual Brain

So if we're not emotionally bonding with our partners during sex, who are we bonding with? To answer that question, you have to understand how the brain works. Sex is a powerful brain stimulant. There are several neurochemical processes that occur during sex, which are the “glue” to human bonding. When someone is involved sexually, it makes him or her want to repeat that act. Their brain produces lots of dopamine—a powerful chemical, which is compared to heroin on the brain. Dopamine is your internal pleasure/reward system. When dopamine is involved, it changes how we remember.

The other part is oxytocin, which is designed to mainly help us forget what is painful. Oxytocin is a hormone produced primarily in women's bodies. When a woman has a child and she is breastfeeding, she produces lots of oxytocin, which bonds her to her child. For this reason, mothers will die for their child, because they've become emotionally bonded due to the oxytocin that is released when they're skin-to-skin with their child.

The same phenomenon occurs when a woman is intimate with a man. Oxytocin is released, and this makes her bond to him emotionally. Have you wondered sometimes why a woman will stay with a man who's abusing her? We know now that it's partly because she bonded to him emotionally because of the oxytocin released during sex.

Men produce vasopressin, which is also referred to as the “monogamy hormone,” and it has the same effect as oxytocin has on a woman. It bonds a man to a woman. These “bonding” agents narrow our selection to one person. That is wonderful in a marriage relationship but really bad in a dating relationship because you lose your objectivity when you're searching for your potential life-mate. And equally harmful when you're

using pornography as a married person, as the synthetic is setting you up for an adulterous affair. Sex, whether physical or vicarious, hooks us into relationships.

Becoming Bonded With Porn

These same neurochemicals are present when viewing pornography or fantasizing about pornographic images while being intimate with your spouse. A person will become bonded with whatever he is engaged in during the moment these chemicals are released. When your relationship is being carried on with an image, you become bonded to whatever you're viewing—whether it's physical or in your head.

Dr. Doug Weiss, a marriage counselor, advises men in the Conquer Series, a church small group study on biblical sexuality, to have eye contact with their wives during sex because they become bonded with that person. By doing this, he explains that, over time, individuals will decrease the “neural pathway to pornography and sexually inappropriate thoughts and beliefs and glue to healthy sexuality to [their] wife. When your brain thinks sex, it thinks, ‘Where’s my wife?’ And that is a great way to fight this battle.”

Cycle of Sexual Sin

For someone viewing porn, one of the functions of oxytocin is to separate the experience and the excitement from the intensity of the shame. According to neuropsychologist Dr. Jes Montgomery, “Usually by the time they turn the computer off, they are already sinking into a sense of failure and shame, and the function of oxytocin is to tell the brain, ‘Wait a minute. You don’t want to remember that. You want to hold on to this excitement and this amazing magic that you just experienced.’”

Knowing how these neurochemicals interact and change the brain help us understand why sex is meant to be kept within the boundaries of marriage. You see the overtones here about God’s

design for His pure temple. This is another reason why the devil attacks our sexuality so much—because in attacking human sexuality, it actually interferes with human bonding. God wired and designed our brains for a specific purpose: to bond us with the person we marry.

Safe Sex

Our culture promotes the idea that love follows good sex, when actually the opposite is true. Good sex comes from forging strong emotional bonds, which in turn leads to better sex and an even stronger bond, and so on. In essence, the key to great sex is when sex becomes a safe place for us and our partner—when we can trust each other with our needs and wants and be vulnerable with each other. This means forsaking all others—be it pornography and our own fears and selfishness—and risking our hearts to become one with the person we've vowed to love.

Jennings, Weiss and Montgomery are just several of the many experts featured in the Conquer Series 6-disk DVD set who provide amazing insights for healthy, biblical sexuality. The Conquer Series is being used as a small group study by thousands of churches in nearly 40 countries. It was voted #1 documentary series by the Christian Film Database in 2014. You can read more about Dr. Sue Johnson's research in her book *Love Sense*. Covenant Eyes statistics: