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The Use of Erotic Video In Sex Therapy

Erotic videos have been increasingly recognized for their value as a prelude to sexual activity. This acceptance has been spurred on by changes in societal attitudes toward sexuality and the availability of VCR's in the home.

Traditionally, erotic videos were made to appeal exclusively to men, and more recently, women and couples are discovering in the privacy of their homes, how erotic video can enhance their sexual lives. Even those who find old style 'porn' offensive, often find that they enjoy and benefit from the new, more sensitive erotica.

Dr. Helen Singer Kaplan, the late world renowned psychiatrist and sex therapist often recommended erotic videos to her patients, describing them as "non-chemical aphrodisiacs". In fact the disorders for which this stimulus is most helpful are hypoactive sexual desire, and problems of arousal and orgasm, excluding premature ejaculation. Prescribing erotic videos can also be helpful in differentiating psychogenic from physical causalities.

Throughout time, people have been seeking aphrodisiacs to boost desire and aid in sexual performance. Erotic videos are experienced by many as this aphrodisiac. They are readily available and inexpensive, and many people find them beneficial as an enhancement to their

sexual expression. The following is a discussion of some of the uses for erotic videos in sex therapy.

To Add Diversity to a Monogamous Relationship:

More than ever, people are choosing to be monogamous. The book *Hot Monogamy* by Love and Robinson describes a trend toward brightening up a couple's sex life in the interest of preserving a happy relationship. Erotic videos are a way to keep sex new and different. They only require unleashing erotic imagination. For instance for those who crave partner variety without risk, Cameron Grant's "The Dinner Party" shows a variety of couples engaged in a fantasy group sexual experience. This not only provides exposure to group sex, but also offers visual examples of a myriad of ways to make love.

To Enhance Sexual Desire:

Sometimes patients have low libidos because they lack a particular sexual fantasy that works for them, or they find it difficult to focus on one. In these cases, they may be better able to recall the visual memory of a video than to create a fantasy of their own. Watching erotic videos also enables the patient to determine the type of visual stimulation that is optimal for them before learning to fantasize about it.



For example, one happily married woman reported that she lacked sexual desire because she did not have a preferred sexual fantasy. After watching a suggested series of videotapes, she found she responded to one particular scenario in Candida Royalle's 'Christine's Secret' (Femme Productions), thus stirring a wonderful dormant fantasy. This scene chronicled an erotic experience of Christine, a lovely young woman visiting a country inn. Looking through her window, she sees an attractive man in another room standing by his window stroking his penis. As he becomes aware of her presence, both become intensely aroused and both masturbate, each in their respective rooms.

This video segment tapped into a dormant childhood memory of the patient's baby brother and the way he would touch his genitals. The recollection of this erotic imagery triggered by the video increased her sexual desire when making love with her husband. Dr. Kaplan maintained that the therapist's challenge is to unearth these "buried treasures" and cultivate them in the patient's mind.

In global desire disorders, specifically when there is little or no physiological causality, the most helpful videos are the more explicit ones showing graphic sexual acts and sexual body parts. These patients need a jolt, an overload of stimuli. This can allow them to feel more sexual and to bypass their resistance to desire and performance. For patients who lack desire for their specific partner, it may be helpful at first to have them "tune out" their partner, and "tune into" the video. This strategy reduces anxiety in patients by providing them with a less threatening visual image than their actual partner.

To Increase Arousal

When performance anxiety leads to problems of arousal, erotic videos can also be helpful by aiding patients to "take a detour" around their anxious feelings. In other words, by providing a powerful image to focus upon, the viewer is distracted from their preoccupation with sexual functioning or anti-erotic thoughts. Under these altered conditions, feelings of arousal can flourish. Further, a person with a drug-induced sexual problem would also benefit from pumping up the volume of stimuli through erotic video usage.

For Incongruent Sexual Preference

For couples whose sexual preferences do not coincide, the videos can help them to function together despite their differences. For example, if one person needs sadomasochistic or homosexual stimuli or a specific fetish fantasy for erotic stimulation, and the other does not, an erotic video can provide a successful compromise. It is also helpful in introducing the partner to a new mode of sexual experience that they might otherwise find foreign or unacceptable. For example, one male patient preferred to be dominated during sex and his wife could not understand his request. After viewing "Leather for Lovers" (Voyages Catalogue Group) *she* learned how to assume a more dominant role in sex, tapping more powerfully into his erotic desires.

To Provide Sex Information and Dispel Myths:

Seeing lovemaking portrayed in an open positive light can be liberating to patients with repressed and negative attitudes about sex. Of course, the video must be chosen carefully so as not to reinforce negative messages. In these cases, it is often preferable if the players are presented as everyday people who lead respectable lives, rather than as promiscuous unsavory types. A few examples of tapes that educate as well as excite are the Better Sex series, the Intimacy Getaway Series, and the Playboy Videos.

To Illustrate Direct Sexual Communication:

When it comes to **sexual communication**, there are few good role models available to us in film. Even mainstream movies with explicit sex scenes classically portray sex as occurring without conversation. Erotic videos can illustrate in pictures what is difficult to express in words. They also provide the role modeling of direct sexual communication that is sensitive, endearing, specific and lighthearted. Many of the newer videos illustrate the use of "pillow talk" during lovemaking where couples offer suggestions, comments, and appreciation to one another. The value of "after play", which has been said to be the start of foreplay, is also emphasized.

To MODEL ASSERTIVENESS:

Erotic videos can be quite helpful in modeling assertiveness for those who find it hard to ask for what they want sexually. People hesitate to request the specific type of stimulation they need for fear of offending their partner, or because their own sexual inhibitions prevent them from doing so. Video provides a solution to this problem. For instance, one partner can suggest that they try it like the couple in the videotape.

Women, in particular, stand to benefit from watching assertive role models in erotic videos. In this new genre, women initiate sex at least as often as the men do. They present a convincing and instructive picture of how women pleasure themselves and their partners. For women who have never had an orgasm, or for those who are inhibited in the presence of a partner, the videos show a variety of ways that this may be accomplished, such as through clitoral assistance during intercourse. One such example is the "Up and Comers Series" which presents women behaving naturally and assertively during lovemaking.

To Cope With Changes That Accompany Age:

As we grow older, we may require more heightened stimulation, both physically and mentally. Erotic videos can help in providing suggestions and examples for expanding one's sexual repertoire and erotic imagination. It may be easier to try new positions or modes of stimulation if one has seen it on film. Also, videos that feature an older couple making love act to dispel the myth that older people are asexual i.e., "Three Daughters", "Sex: A Lifelong Pleasure"; "Love and Aging"; "Sex After Fifty".

To Aid Patients With Physical Problems:

For patients with chronic or temporary pain, the new genre of erotic videos diminishes the focus on genital sex while encouraging foreplay and sensuality. For example, women with chronic interstitial cystitis often experience bladder flare-ups during or after prolonged intercourse. The tapes may help them to become more aroused prior to penetration. For people who have undergone surgery such as a mastectomy or a colostomy, videos can provide a bridge that facilitates sexual recovery, both for the partner who had the surgery and for the one who has not.

Sexual Disorders For Which Erotic Videos Are Not Suggested.

Erotic videos are not usually recommended for men with problems of premature ejaculation since eroticizing distracts these patients from focusing on the penile sensations necessary to regulate ejaculation. In addition, erotic videos are not suggested for all patients with sexual aversion disorder, as these patients can become overly anxious when viewing tapes that contain material too advanced for them. Similarly some individuals with a history of sexual abuse may respond negatively to erotic video, particularly old-style pornography where women are often degraded or objectified.

Some men with erectile disorder have been known to become even more discouraged when viewing others who function with relative ease. Traditional adult movies can heighten performance anxiety because many portray male actors as having continual unusually large erections. The new erotic video tends to show men in a less exaggerated light. Similarly, women with poor body image might feel threatened viewing videos featuring beautifully proportioned female bodies. Amateur erotic videos may be a good alternative because they portray real people of all shapes and sizes rather than professional actors with "perfect bodies".

Incorporating the patient(s) values, preferences, sexual issues, and therapeutic goals into the video choice is paramount. Therefore, before recommending a specific erotic video, the therapist should always view it first. This enables the therapist to make the best recommendation, taking into account the couples therapeutic issues, values, and state of readiness.

Oftentimes, the sex therapist may encounter various kinds of resistance to erotic video assignments. Embarrassment over being seen renting is a common response. This reaction is often based on not wanting to look foolish, or being afraid of ridicule and/or rejection from their partner. Many therapists get around this by keeping a lending library of erotic videos on hand for their patients or suggest using adult channels on pay-cable.

Another common response is that the therapist might be told after suggesting a video that the

home VCR is in an inconvenient place, or that they don't know how to operate it. Further, the couple might engage in critiquing the video production, or they may just watch the tape and not connect to it in an erotic fashion.

These reactions all present therapeutic opportunities to address sexual issues, work through resistances, and resolve sexual problems. The teachable moment comes when we can encourage positive sexuality, immersion in sensory-based feelings and imagery, allay fears, and enhance the full expression of sexuality and pleasure.

Conclusion:

To overcome a sexual dysfunction and/or add luster to one's sexual life, remember the truism "one picture can be worth a thousand words." Erotic videos, when used in the right way, can be a very effective tool in resolving psychosexual problems.

CliniScope

Clinical Monograph

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