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## **Fantasy In Digital Sexual Behavior**

Fantasy is a part of human sexual behavior. The amount of fantasy in one's sex life and the degree to which fantasy deviates from "real life behavior" varies from person to person. Fantasy in digital sexual behavior falls roughly into two categories; passive and interactive.

Passive digital fantasy generally involves viewing or reading sexually stimulating material and imagining oneself in the image or story. The consumer of digital sexual content enhances the titillation of the content by thinking about being part of the scene. Passive fantasy is internal and private. It can influence sexual interest through repetition and patterning with physical sexual response.

Interactive digital fantasy generally involves sharing of fantasy with others. The sharing can be asynchronous (posting on adult sites, delayed email communication, etc. ), synchronous (reciprocal sexting, IM, etc.) or immediate (chat, phone sex, webcamming, etc.). Regardless of the form it takes, interactive fantasy involves more than one individual participating in a mutual fantasy. Sexual response is heightened by the support of others engaged in the fantasy. Interactive fantasy most often takes the form of "I'd do this to you" or "we'd do this together". Whether or not either individual participating would actually engage in the stated behavior when co-present 'in real life', is moot. It is fantasy. Interactive fantasy has greater potential to influence sexual interest simply because there is support for the ideation by another individual. Moreover, interactive fantasy can have a multiplier effect. Each person can build on the other's interests or introduce new ideas or approaches. Thus each may be introduced to behavior or ideas they had not considered or sexualize behavior previously considered asexual. Repetition and patterning with physical sexual response is likely to be more conditioning with interactive fantasy.

Role play is a sub-set of interactive fantasy. It is essentially psycho-dramatic in nature with each participant taking a role in a mutually agreed upon scene. For example, two individuals may agree to play "Teacher/Student". One individual (generally the male) assumes the role of a teacher while the other (generally the female) plays the role of a 'naughty' student. The underlying function of role play is to use differential (status, power, age, knowledge, physical stature, relationship, etc.) to enhance sexual response.

Age play (differences in ages among the roles played) is a common theme in a significant amount of role play. Relationship between participants (family, professional, 'position of trust', etc.) is another common theme in role play. The 'fruit from the forbidden tree' is a powerful stimulus and often is used as part of fantasy. Incest relationships (father/daughter, brother/sister, uncle/niece, cousins, mother/son, etc.), for example, are significantly represented in erotic literature (they represent the second largest set of erotic literature on the web) and are among the most widely used themes in role play.

In all fantasy, what individuals say they would do and what they would actually do is disparate; that is precisely what fantasy is. The difficulty for those responsible for assessing risk among sexual offenders is discriminating when fantasy elements are 'in role play only' and when they have begun to mold interests and generate impetus toward acting 'in real life'. There are, however, four factors which give some measure of the probability fantasy will begin to influence real life behavior. These factors are the "Four F's"; focus, frequency, facilitation, and fixation.

- Focus:** Focus means two things with regard to fantasy. First, how narrow is the scope of the fantasy? Is the individual willing to participate in any fantasy, or only specific topics? Do the topics have a common theme regarding status, power, age, knowledge, physical stature or relationship? Second, how insistent is the individual about engaging in fantasy? Is the individual willing to engage others without fantasy? How soon in an encounter does the individual seek fantasy or role play?
- Frequency:** The frequency of fantasy or role play has significant effect on the fantasy leading to real life sexual behavior. A fantasy played frequently becomes a powerful stimulus to engage in the behavior 'in real life'. It normalizes the fantasy behavior and conditions sexual response to the fantasy behavior.
- Facilitation:** Are there elements in the individuals real life which would facilitate acting out the fantasy? Does the individual have access to persons similar to the fantasy partner(s)? Does the individual have the ability to control elements in another's life such that they could be groomed or coerced into participating in the fantasy behavior?
- Fixation:** Is the fantasy fixated on a real, accessible person? Fantasizing about a specific person in one's life is much more likely to become a planning fantasy and lead to real life behavior than are fantasies about a celebrity, generic person, or stranger. Movement from 'would do' to 'will do' is reinforced when the target of the fantasy is actually in one's life. The probability of engaging a celebrity in sexual behavior is understood to be remote for those absent mental illness. A generic person in a fantasy is by definition nameless and faceless, thus unavailable for real life behavior. However, fantasy about a person who is real and accessible can turn fantasy to planning rather than imaginative relief. Repeated fantasy about individuals within one's life increase the probability of real life behavior with that individual.