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Commentary by Regina Lynn

Imagine All the People, Loving in 3-D

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How many times have you heard people utter contradictory convictions in the same breath without their noticing they were doing so?

My favorite is the ridiculous, "We have to stop those lazy immigrants from taking our jobs." Another common one is, "Lawyers are slimy, evil bastards. I hope my kid goes to law school (or marries a lawyer)."

We have a lot of funny-but-not-ha-ha-funny oxymora in sex, too, and a [recent study](#) by professor Juan Carlos Sierra Friere of the University of Granada has reminded me of one of the most common misconceptions we (still!) cling to about sex and technology.

"An active erotic imagination -- sexual fantasy -- is key to a great sex life," say the sexuality experts.

"People who play out sexual fantasies online are weird, perverted loners who can't maintain healthy sexual relationships (or even get laid) in real life," say the media and the masses.

Curiously, people who have actually involved themselves in some form of sex online rarely subscribe to that belief. We know it's not all unicorns and sunflowers (not that there's anything wrong with that), and we also know it's not nearly as simple as the rest would have us believe.

It can't be, because it's not the technology that keeps us there -- it's the people. And nothing is more complicated than people.

Sierra's study looked at men's and women's attitudes toward sex, their ability to fantasize, and their anxiety levels, assessing how those factors influenced their sex drives.

What he found was no surprise: The more positive one's attitude about sex and the more active one's fantasy life, the higher one's desire for sex. Likewise, the more negatively one feels about sex and the less one fantasizes, the lower one's desire for sex. Anxiety inhibits desire in both sexes.

Right now, you are nodding and wondering why such a thing needs to be studied, it's so obvious -- especially the desire-deadening effect of anxiety. But sometimes even people who Should Know Better don't accept the truth until it's been catechized by a Study.

The rest is a bit chicken and egg. People with higher sex drives probably spend more time fantasizing than those who don't rev as high; seems to me that while fantasy increases desire, desire also increases fantasy.

You can't say the same for high libido corresponding with positive attitudes about sex, though. I've known people who feel tremendously guilty for their "insatiable" sex drives and who develop all kinds of worries and negative feelings out of misplaced guilt. For them, fantasy can lead to frustration, anger and self-loathing because they think (or are told) they shouldn't be so "obsessed" with sex.

How we think about sex has a tremendous impact on how we relate sexually, maintain sexual relationships, even how we perform in bed. If you've always had an open, positive, flexible outlook on sex, you might not realize just how crippling or obstructive the mind can be about even the simplest forms of sexual expression. (Lucky you.)

Sierra concludes that fantasy and attitude are just as important in healthy sexuality as physical stimulation and response, and that sexual-education programs should address the mental side as well as the physical.

How convenient that we have a handy tool that can support us through that learning process -- if we can shift our paradigm far enough to do so.

Part of our wariness about internet-enabled sex is well-founded: We've seen too many relationships destroyed because one partner plunged into a period of all-consuming online life while the other looked on, feeling neglected and rejected.

To the outside partner, the internet teems with sirens singing unsuspecting lovers to their doom. To the inside partner, the internet fills those missing places they never thought to fill -- in large part because the imagination has to work harder than the body to achieve sexual connection in this medium, and the resulting sexual connection can be very, very strong.

That's one reason women are so good at it. Heh.

But if you're single, internet widowhood is not your concern. And it's you and your future lovers who stand to benefit the most from your willingness to use the internet as a gym for your erotic imagination.

If you can think of it as a learning experience -- a self-directed, peer-to-peer education program with emergent curriculum and several group projects -- you can defend against societal disapproval with a knowing glance and a secret smile.

Because if you can get online to shape up your erotic imagination, you will have the support of like-minded people, the freedom to build and share your visions, and the opportunity to explore ideas without having to purchase expensive props or refurnish a room. You are also likely to learn how to seduce and be seduced, or to discover a flair for metaphor or storytelling or erotolinguus.

These are all transferable skills.

Give it six months, a year, maybe two, and you will work through the sexual shame or anxiety that might otherwise inhibit your desire or your courage. You will become more secure in who you are, what you want and what you have to offer.

There's nothing like sexual confidence -- true confidence, not arrogance -- to attract other grounded, sexually stable folks.

If humans truly are hard-wired for sexual fantasy, it's wrong to dismiss the internet as merely a false utopia that lures otherwise sensible people into adultery, "addiction" or part-time porn jobs.

Visualization is a powerful tool much touted by athletes, public speakers and doctors. It works that way in sex, too: The more you envision delight and pleasure, the more you are likely to experience it. (Likewise, the more your sexual thoughts involve anxiety or trauma, the harder it is to experience delightful sex.)

It seems to me that romping around sexually in our collective heads is not only a pleasurable hobby but actually feeds a human need. Then we will be better equipped to figure out a healthier way to integrate cyberspace into our sexual evolution.

See you next Friday,

Regina Lynn

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[Regina Lynn](#) fantasizes about being deft enough with 3-D graphics to bring her fantasy world to life to share with you.