

## INTERNET AND MULTIMEDIA REVIEW

# Introducing a new section for the multimedia age

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Without exaggeration, technology is increasingly playing a substantial and pervasive role in the lives of people all around the world. As I ride the subway to work each day I notice more and more of my fellow riders typing on laptops, clicking on PDAs or chatting on cell phones. We are wirelessly connected to the Internet in our homes, coffee shops, hotel rooms and increasingly everywhere else. Digital cameras, camcorders, webcams, chatrooms, and Voice-Over-Internet Protocol (VoIP) phones are fundamentally changing every dimension of our communication. These technologies are altering the ways we relate to each other and thereby how we define and engage in relationships. This is especially true in one of the most intimate aspect of how we relate—sexually. Sex is such a large part of the Internet that it has been labeled “an erotic oasis” (Ross *et al.*, 2000) and the Internet is increasingly becoming a large part of sexuality. Individuals are presenting for treatment resulting from “problematic” sexual use of the Internet or threats to their offline relationships because of online behaviours. Therapy consumers are now receiving treatment for sexual and relationship problems via the Internet, independent of whether the Internet played a role in the development of the problem. Similarly, the day is coming when the Internet will no longer be considered an “emerging technology” for the collection of sexuality data, but instead a standard methodology (see Mustanski, 2001 for an early discussion of using the Internet for sexuality research). Beyond the Internet, technology such as DVDs and interactive equipment are also simultaneously being driven by sex and changing the nature of sexuality.

Dr. Al Cooper (2003), the previous editor of this section, wisely pointed out that it is incumbent upon sexual and relationship therapists to be familiar with multimedia and Internet resources in order to be able to differentiate between that which can be helpful or harmful. I would add that sexual and relationship researchers also need to be aware of these technologies as they are relevant to the behaviours we study and a

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method to study them. However, with the rapid emergence and adaptation of these resources it is nearly impossible for anyone to stay up to date. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to review Internet and multimedia resources—sifting out the good from the bad. An emergent property of this section may be an increased ability of researchers and therapists to differentiate and utilize these materials, and maybe even to influence the quality of materials being produced.

The focus of this section is on Internet and multimedia materials relevant to sexual and relationship therapy and clinical research. The scope is purposely broad and ambiguous, allowing this section to remain relevant as new technology and resources emerge. At present, the scope includes, but is not limited to, stand-alone or adjunctive resources useful to consumers of sexual and relationship therapy and education, materials useful in training clinicians and researchers, and materials useful for clinical and research practice (e.g. multimedia or Internet assessment materials). The scope also includes multimedia and Internet materials that therapists are likely to encounter in their practice (e.g. dating websites) or that researchers should be aware of in the development of hypotheses or the planning of studies (e.g. a useful website to recruit research participants). Furthermore, given the international distribution of the *Journal*, materials sourced from around the globe will be considered, although preferably they should have the potential for international impact and/or distribution.

The identification of materials for review is the mutual responsibility of the Editor and the community of sexual and relationship therapists and researchers. Please consider nominating specific materials or general content areas for potential review. Individuals who are interested in reviewing materials are also encouraged to contact the Section Editor. We hope to be able offer several reviews in each issue. Please contact me at [bmustanski@psych.uic.edu](mailto:bmustanski@psych.uic.edu) with your ideas and offers to review.

When preparing a review there are several criteria that reviewers are encouraged to apply. Consistency across reviews in the coverage of these criteria will help readers evaluate the relative merit of multimedia and Internet resources relevant to sexual and relationship therapy. At the discretion of the reviewer, the following criteria should be applied:

1. **Scope and Purpose:** What is the purpose of the material? Is the purpose clearly stated and achieved? Who is the intended audience of the material: experts, sexual and/or relationship therapy consumers, or others? Will the source satisfy the needs of the intended users? Does the material provide comprehensive coverage of the subject area? Are there any notable omissions?
2. **Content:** Is the information in the resource accurate? What is the reputation of the source? Is the source an expert and what is his/her standing in the relevant field? Are the authors and their credentials clearly identified? Is the information up to date and likely to remain up to date? Are there significant biases and are they acknowledged? Are relevant references cited appropriately? Is the resource available in multiple languages?
3. **Design:** Is the content well designed? Is the resource interesting, easy to navigate, efficient, and consistently high quality? Are there any notable errors in design? How interactive is the resource? Does access require special

software or hardware? What is the level of technical competence required to use the resource? Is it accessible across the globe? If registration is required, is the process straightforward?

4. Cost: What is the cost of the resource in UK pounds? Are there renewable or other additional costs? Does the resource seem to be worth the investment? Is the material copyrighted? If it is licensed, is it possible to share it with colleagues and patients?
5. How does the resource measure up to comparable resources? Using the criteria above, would you recommend this resource over a comparable one? How unique is this resource?

These criteria are merely suggestions. Their usefulness will certainly vary by resource and reviewers should take liberty in their utilization.

As Internet coverage expands and multimedia resources continue to evolve, they will increasingly play a role in defining relationships and sex, the assessment and treatment of sexual and relationship dysfunction, and also potentially causing sexual and relationship problems. We hope that this section will give our readers greater familiarity with relevant Internet and multimedia resources and also help them evaluate their quality. This feedback may also be useful to those who develop such materials as they come to realize what factors sexual and relationship therapists and researchers value. I look forward to hearing your ideas about materials meriting reviews and hopefully offers to write reviews.

## References

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