

More Tech, More Talking: How Evolving Sex Tech Impacts Fidelity Agreements

Basic Premise

Sex technology is evolving quickly and will become increasingly available, so couples, clinicians, and sexuality educators need to be ready to discuss how these new options fit into the couple's relationship. Thinking about and discussing sex tech and how it fits into your sexuality and relationship helps you sort out your fidelity agreement even if you aren't interested in actually using any of the new sex tech. *What* a couple ultimately decides may be less important than *why*.

Sex Tech is Expanding Rapidly

Technology is used to expand human ability and/or experience. Since people are sexual, technology becomes sexual, too—some by design, some by incidental use (e.g., using a car to get to a date). The new sex tech is expanding our sexual abilities and available experiences. This creates new opportunities for individuals and couples to expand what they do sexually, but also requires that those individuals and couples think about how this new sex tech fits into their existing sex lives and relationships. While much of this new sex tech is quite new and perhaps has niche audiences, it is evolving quickly, getting cheaper, and becoming more accessible. Given the struggles that individuals, couples, and society have had with standard online porn, it is only reasonable to think that more lifelike options will create additional struggles that will need to be overcome.

Sex technology is closing the distance between producers and consumers of sexual material. For example, when pictures are printed in magazines, there is no interaction between producers and consumers. Now, with real time online interactivity, that space is closing. While some people will enjoy this closer interaction, others will feel threatened by it and worry that it crosses the line from solo masturbatory activities into infidelity with another person.

Given that sex technology will only become more prevalent, it is better to discuss it preemptively, rather than deal with it after the fact. Even if one is not interested in using any of the new sex technology, it is still thought provoking to consider how it may impact both individuals' and couples' sexuality and relationships.

Fidelity Agreements

3 potential relationship threats of sex tech:

1. *Fidelity betrayal*: feels like cheating
2. *Sexual drain*: leaves less sexual energy available for partner (or may be perceived that way)
3. *Time drain*: leaves less time available for partner (or may be perceived that way)

Should these threats be addressed differently from other relationship challenges?

Fidelity agreements involve what is and isn't acceptable within the bounds of the relationship, including non-monogamous relationships. Most couples don't have sufficient discussion about the specific boundaries of fidelity—much less *why* those are the boundaries. Therefore, their fidelity agreements contain many unspoken assumptions which can lead to sudden discoveries where each member feels differently (and strongly) about a particular activity, including everything from Facebooking an ex to doing webcam sex.

The increasing realism and accessibility provided by evolving sex tech can confront couples' fidelity agreements if they haven't explicitly discussed these matters. This can cause disruptive discoveries, but can also push couples to really think about their fidelity agreement, discuss it more deeply, and come to a better understanding of where each person stands. Where couples run into the most trouble is when the two partners have very different ideas about what constitutes a sexual or emotional infidelity—and each is totally convinced that they are right.

Even if a couple does do the hard work of really exploring their own limits and using empathy to understand the other person's limits, relationships evolve over time and therefore so do the partners' fidelity needs. Rapid changes in technology also change the relationship/sexuality landscape. Therefore, good fidelity agreements are flexible, adaptive, and frequently reviewed.

We can make two strong recommendations to couples when it comes to fidelity agreements, whether related to sex tech or otherwise:

1. Fixed rules become obsolete or new situations may not have been covered, so it is more important to honor the spirit of the agreement than the letter.
2. When in doubt, ask—and always ask before acting.

While talking about one's fidelity agreement can prevent problems, it is also an opportunity for greater understanding of oneself and one's partner.

Sex Tech & All Its Variations

Many people may not be aware of the new developments in sex tech, let alone what questions may be worth considering in relation to these new developments. Let's explore them. Think not only about how you would answer the questions for your own activities, but also how you would answer them regarding your partner's activities, as well as how your partner would answer them for themselves and for you.

Ultra-Realistic Sex Dolls

Companies like RealDoll sell ultra-realistic, completely customizable sex dolls.

They're not a real person, but would it still feel like cheating?

How do you feel about the body part options chosen (e.g., giant breasts), particularly if they differ significantly from your own?

Ultra-Realistic Virtual Reality Porn

VR headsets create an extremely immersive experience that includes 180 or 360 degree views, 3D graphics, and stereo sound. This is especially true if the video is shot from the viewer's perspective so that it looks like the action is happening to the viewer's "body". This high realism blurs the line even more between audience and participant.

How do you feel about VR porn versus standard 2D porn?

Are certain situations or sex acts less comfortable or acceptable to you?

Webcams

Webcams allow online sex shows with multiple options. On some websites, the communication is strictly in one direction, where viewers log in and watch whatever the actor(s) does. Some cam sites allow audience members to submit requests ahead of time; others in real time. Audience members can also send gifts of various kinds, from money to items. Some webcammers will do a private, request-driven show for a single viewer. And, of course, individuals can webcam each other where the primary goal is sexual gratification for both/all participants, without any financial involvement.

Is watching a pre-scripted, non-interactive, but live webcam show different from watching pre-recorded porn videos?

How do you feel about submitting requests to a webcammer for a large audience show—and do you feel differently if it is submitted ahead of time versus as the show is running?

How do you feel about a private and interactive webcam show? Is it different from going to a strip club and/or getting a lap dance?

How do you feel about sending gifts to a webcammer?

Would you feel differently about a paid professional webcammer versus webcamming with one other person where the video is seen by both people, no money is exchanged, and the primary goal for both people is getting sexually gratified?

Teledildonics/Cyberdildonics/Technosexuality

Sex Toy/Video Interactivity

Some internet-connected sex toys can interact with online videos.

Video → device: the action in feelXvideos.com (e.g., timing and speed of thrusts) is mimicked by the action of the Kiirroo Onyx on the viewer's penis.

Device → video: the user's action on the Fleshlight VStroker (speed of thrusts, orgasm) is mimicked by what is shown in the video.

In both cases, the viewer's experience is more closely aligned with what is happening on the screen, making for a more immersive experience.

How do you feel about this additional level of interactivity with online videos?

Internet-Connected Devices

Internet-connected sex toys (e.g., OhMiBod, We-Vibe) can be controlled remotely by an app, including by offering customizable vibration patterns and less fiddling with little buttons on the device itself. These can be used by people in the same room, as well as across thousands of miles. Some of these apps also include (presumably) private video chatrooms while using the device. Some devices can synchronize the action between two or more sex toys (e.g., Kiiroo's male and female versions) where the action to one device determines the action on another device.

The fidelity connection: Whatever can be used with your partner can also be used with someone else. Given the relatively small number of long distance relationships, the growing market is likely to involve interactive experiences with someone other than one's partner. This may involve the viewer controlling the action of a performer's device or a performer controlling the action of the viewer's or viewers' device(s). For example, a professional performing oral sex on the Kiiroo Pearl can transmit those sensations to viewers' Kiiroo Onyx.

How do you feel about remotely controlling someone else's sex toy?

How do you feel about someone else remotely controlling your sex toy?

Does it matter if it is a paid professional versus another person who is also getting primarily sexual gratification (rather than financial)?

In Conclusion

Sex tech is evolving quickly—*is your thinking?*