

THE FANTASY FALLACY

Exposing the Deeper Meaning Behind Sexual Thoughts

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7 Distortions of Sexuality

1. Polygamy (Gen. 4:19)
2. Homosexual Rape (Gen. 19:5)
3. Fornication (Gen. 38:16-18)
4. Heterosexual Rape (Gen. 34:2)
5. Prostitution (Gen. 38:15)
6. Incest (Gen. 19:30-32)
7. Evil Seduction (Gen. 39:7)

Aren't these the SAME things so many fantasize about today? The Devil has NO new tricks!

How is Fantasy a Friend?

Fantasy can...

1. numb us to unbearable pain.
2. motivate us toward an established goal.
3. help us prepare for a life transition.
4. warn us about a possible future event.
5. help us endure separation.
6. comfort us as we age.

How great that God designed the human brain to have such a vivid imagination!

10 Things Effective Counselors Understand About Fantasy...

1. Many Christians believe ANY sexual thought is sinful, but that doesn't line up with scripture.
2. In Matthew 5:27-29, Jesus was addressing the Pharisees' notion that they were "holy enough" to get themselves into heaven. This passage is primarily about eternal salvation, not sexual doctrine.
3. In Matthew 5:29, Jesus said, "Gouge out your eye if it causes you to sin!" (Matt. 5:29) Yet He knew that physical blindness wouldn't be sufficient to cure us of all our sexual depravity! He wasn't telling us to maim ourselves, but merely urging us to *take sin seriously!*
4. Sexual fantasies are often simply the brain's way of trying to heal itself of past trauma, disillusionment, or disappointment — *not* necessarily an indicator of sickness or perversion!
5. Sexual Fantasies are NOT a reliable road map toward future fulfillment, but rather, a road map of our rocky past! Understanding today's fantasy will often reveal yesterday's unresolved pain.
6. We can't "take thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ" if we don't understand where they come from! We must look beyond the *fruit* of fantasies to discover the *root!*
7. The sexual brain's job is to compartmentalize pain long enough to experience euphoric pleasure!
8. Regarding sexual dreams or fantasies involving a certain person, it's *never* about *that person!* He/she is merely an "archetype" that plays a certain role in the dreamer's ideal scenario, which often serves to "recreate a particular dynamic" in order to "win this time."
9. If we find a particular fantasy terribly troubling, we have two options: Change the dynamics of the fantasy (see reverse side on "Retraining the Sexual Brain"), or change our response to it.
10. To control our fantasies (rather than allowing them to control us) doesn't mean that we NEVER have them, but rather, that we never *act on them* in an unbiblical way. Remember, even Jesus dealt with sexual thoughts and feelings (Hebrews 4:14-16) and proved that there is NO SIN in being tempted!

Retraining the Sexual Brain

(excerpted from *The Fantasy Fallacy*
by Shannon Ethridge)

When sexual fantasies feel more like a burden than a blessing, the momentary pleasure they provide can pale in comparison to the long-term anxiety they create. But with focused effort, our brains can be retrained to go in alternative (yet still pleasurable) directions.

Remember, a fantasy is simply a story in our heads, and we are the narrators of those stories. We decide how the stories take shape, what characters are involved, how we respond to them, and how long the scene goes on before it's served its purpose and the curtain comes down. We are in complete control.

We can always distract our brains away from invasive fantasies as we are going about our day. Men especially have to become masters at this since sexual thoughts occur far more frequently in the male brain.

But what about when we're actually *having sex* . . . and *sex* is exactly what we want to think about? Can we edit or even silence unwanted fantasies altogether? Indeed, we have that power by simply:

Taking our time. We often resort to fantasy when we feel the need to rush the process and race to the finish line. Time restraints create stress, and the brain often turns to fantasy simply as a way to cope with that stress. Eliminate the lack-of-time stress altogether, and you may eliminate the need for fantasy altogether as well.

Opening your eyes. If you're troubled by how your mind is drifting away from your spouse into someone else's direction, open your eyes, turn on a dim light, and bring your brain back to reality. This is your beloved, your marriage bed, your time to delight and be delighted in the presence of your partner. Choose to bask in this reality, rather than in an unwanted fantasy.

Engage your sense of hearing. Music is an incredibly sensual tool, especially for women who are typically more stimulated by what they *hear* more than what they *see*. By playing music that you find intimately relaxing or even energizing, your brain entertains the lyrics and the melody rather than an extraneous fantasy. If you find music too distracting to focus on your partner, simply allow yourself to make noises while making love. The vocal sounds of a sexually charged couple thoroughly enjoying one another can be all the arousal you need!

Changing positions. Our brains can begin to wander when we get too comfortable in bed, just as they can in class when we get too comfortable at our desk. By moving our body around and increasing blood flow, we stimulate the brain to remain focused on the subject at hand.

Focus on your breathing. The brain can be stimulated to concentrate on what you're doing by simply taking a few deep breaths, focusing on your inhalation and exhalation. Just as deep breathing helps us remain mentally present, focused, and sharp during physical exercise or while driving a car, the same is true in the bedroom.

Interrupting the Reward Cycle. If you no longer want to orgasm to thoughts that ultimately bring guilt and shame, then don't. No one is holding a gun to your head until you climax. Explain to your spouse that you may decide to disengage momentarily from the sexual experience for a hot shower or a cup of tea or some other relaxing ritual. Don't encourage the brain to entertain certain fantasies by rewarding it with an orgasmic response. Once you're feeling more in control of what thoughts are in your mind, return to your lovemaking. This could take some practice, but it's an effective way to teach your brain what *you* want it to find pleasurable, not vice-versa.

If you enjoy a certain fantasy, but are bothered by a specific element of it, try altering the story just a few degrees to bring it in line with your moral values or comfort zone. For example, you can alter an entire story line by:

Changing the dynamic. Perhaps you want to make sure that no one is being forced or hurt in your fantasy. Instead of being victimized by an attacker or abuser, change the fantasy to merely a role-play where you're *pretending* to be victimized but know that you're really in complete control of all that's taking place. Instead of raping or seducing someone against their will in your fantasy, tweak it such that a prior agreement took place and now they're only *playing* hard to get, but you know beyond a doubt that they have every intention of a mutually consenting sexual encounter with you.

Change the age of characters. If the fantasy involves you as a child or teen character with an older adult (as is often the case with sexual abuse victims), make the adult a few years younger and yourself a few years older each time the fantasy comes to mind, until the ages are close enough that the sexual experience would no longer be considered sexually abusive in any way.

Change the identity of characters. Just as the star of any show has an "understudy," you can always substitute your spouse as the main star in your fantasies. The sexy college professor can turn out to be your husband after all. (Who knew he looked so good in a salt-and-pepper beard and horn-rimmed glasses?) Or your wife can play the mental role of the hot babe in the hotel lobby who can't take her eyes off you.

Consider these suggestions as "mental disciplines" to help you strengthen your sexual character. And just like any other strength-building exercise, they'll require practice and perseverance. It may mean that you don't reach climax nearly as quickly as before when fantasies raced through your brain unfiltered and unedited. But the enormous pride and pleasure you'll experience by fully integrating your thought life, sex life, and spiritual life will be well worth every ounce of mental energy invested!

