

## **The Power of Pornography: Protecting Yourself—and Your Family—in a Pornified World**

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I'm not exactly sure how old I was—probably no older than 10. I was playing hide-and-go-seek at my grandparent's house and my uncle lived in the basement apartment.

That day I decided to hide in the basement under my uncle's bed. While under there, I discovered a box of magazines. It *wasn't* Car & Driver or Men's Health. It was magazines like *Playboy*, *Hustler*, and *Penthouse*.

At that age, **I didn't even know what pornography was**. Yet, there I was, face-to-face with what seemed to be endless pages of naked women.

I remember feeling *confused*. Questions flooded my mind. What was I even looking at? Why weren't these women wearing any cloths?

I remember feeling *excited*. Even at that young age, there was something exhilarating about this discovery.

I remember feeling *scared*. I knew that I *shouldn't* be looking at this. I knew there something *wrong* with these magazines. And there was something wrong with me looking at them.

I share this story *because* this is the testimony of *countless* men (and women). Tragically, some of these men (and women) have been feeling **the effects of pornography** ever since.

What effects? Well, the website *Fight the New Drug* receives emails all the time from people who have suffered the harmful effects of pornography. Here's one email:

I have been watching porn at least every day for the last 10 years. I am 23 years old. **[So do the math—he started at age 13]** I got married when I was 21, and I still haven't had sex with my wife. Not because I don't want to, but because I can't. I can't stop watching porn, and I'm unable to become aroused enough to have sex with her. It has been two years, and I can see the pain in her eyes every time we try. I would do anything to change the last 10 years. I would do anything to choose love over porn.

I want to love her with everything that I have, but my addiction to pornography has broken down our relationship to the point that we are now separated until I change or we agree on a divorce. **[Pornography is cited in over 50% of divorces]** I still haven't been aroused by anything other than pixels on a screen for years. I would do anything to go back and choose love.

It might be helpful—before we go too far—to **define what we mean by pornography**. The word comes from the Greek word *pornographia*, which means “the writings about prostitutes.” That is, pornography is designed for a person to interact with the material **as one interacts with a prostitute**.

Let me say something else. This is not *merely* a men's issue. It's *also* a women's issue. *Pornhub*, the world's leading free Internet pornography website, says that *1 in every 5 visitors* to its site is a female. In fact, multiple studies have found that around *one-third* of women view pornography.

So, pornography isn't merely a **man issue**; it's a **human issue**.

This generation has been **more affected** by pornography than any other generation in history. I believe there are *three* major reasons for this. They are *acceptability*, *accessibility*, and *anonymity*. These three A-words have helped pornography thrive in this generation.

Let's briefly look at each of these reasons.

### **Acceptability**

First, there is the growing *acceptability* of pornography in the culture.

Whether we like it or not, the media has a huge impact on our lives. In one sense, media *mirrors* culture. In another sense, media *modifies* culture. So, media can act like a barometer to tell us where we are as a culture *and* to forecast where we are going.

To help illustrate the growing *acceptability* of pornography, consider how TV shows have changed.

There was a time when TV shows wouldn't even show married-couples in the same bed. For example, *I Love Lucy*, which aired October 15, 1951 portrayed Lucy and Ricky sleeping *in separate beds* in an effort to diminish any sexual relations between the couple. Curiously, they still managed to conceive their son Ricky Jr. (I Wonder how that happened, right?)

Now, nearly 70 years later, pornography is *both joked about* in our Sitcoms *and put on full display* in our Dramas. For example, on March 26, 1998, the famous TV show *Friends* aired an episode titled *The One with the Free Porn*. In this episode, Chandler and Joey discover that they're getting a free porn channel on their TV. The entire episode they leave the TV on fearing that they change the channel or turn the TV off they will lose the free porn channel.

[At one point, in the show, Rachel asked Joey and Chandler, "Why don't you just turn it off? Chandler replies, "Rach, because then we'd be the guys that turned off free porn."

Joey follows up by saying, "Rach, look, I want to have a kid some day. And some day that kid is going to ask me if I ever turned off free porn. I don't want to tell him that I did.]"

The implication is, no guy in his right mind would turn off free porn. In fact, you should be embarrassed to tell your son you turned off free porn. The irony is, virtually all porn today is free. This is another reason it thrives: **it's affordable.**

*Game of Thrones* was the most popular show on HBO. It's also known for its gratuitous violence and nudity. By season seven, average viewer numbers had increased to *32.8 million per episode* across all platforms. Interestingly, *Vice.com* counted every instance of rape (and attempted rape) and every instance of nudity for the first seven seasons. In 67 episodes, **there are 17 instances of onscreen rape or attempted rape**—all of which happened to women [that's one every 4 episodes]. And **they found 144 instances of onscreen nudity**, 83.7% being women.

In a study published in 2008 titled *Generation XXX: Pornography Acceptance and Use Among Emerging Adults*, researchers found that "roughly *two thirds* (67%) of young men and *one half* (49%) of young women agree **that viewing pornography is acceptable**, whereas nearly 9 out of 10 (87%) young men and nearly one third (31%) of young women reported using pornography."

We are living at a time when pornography is *acceptable*. But it's not only *acceptable*; it's *accessible*.

## **Accessibility**

Second, this generation is the **more affected** by pornography than any other generation is because of its *accessibility*. True, there has *always* been pornography, **but we've never had this kind of accessibility to it.**

It used to be that if a person wanted to look at pornography, they would have to go to an **adult video show** (or at least the back room of the video show) to rent it, or they would have to go buy a magazine, or they would have to go to a strip club.

Today, everyone in this room is just 'one click away' or 'one Google search away' from pornography. **We carry access to porn in our pockets.**

Because of its accessibility (*and affordability and anonymity*), pornography sites get more visitors each month than *Netflix*, *Amazon*, and *Twitter* combined. Let that register for minute.

For the last 6 years, *Pornhub* has done an annual Year in Review.

They had **33.5 Billion visits** over the course of 2018. That equates to a **daily average of 92 million visitors**. To put that into perspective, that's as if the combined populations of Canada, Poland and Australia all visited one pornographic website *every day*! Something is searched on *Pornhub* *962 times per second*. In 2018 alone, they uploaded 4.79 million new videos, creating *over 1 million hours of new content*. That's 115 years worth of video in just 2018.

And every *minute*, **63,992 new visitors** arrive at *Pornhub*, **207,405 videos are watched** and **57,750 searches are performed**. Every minute!

That's **one** pornography website. How many porn websites are out there? Some estimates are in the 100's of millions.

Here's the question: How does all this pornography affect individuals? How does this affect our relationships? And how does this affect our society?  
Said another way, how does it affect the *brain*, the *heart*, and the *world*?

## The Brain

Let's start with how pornography affects the brain.

The brain—that **three pounds** of grey matter between your ears—is truly amazing. It contains **roughly 90 billion nerve cells**—called *neurons*—with **trillions of cell connections**—called *synapses*. When connected together, these synapses form back roads, highways, and superhighways in your brain that signals travel along.

Brain scientists used to think that the brain was like a **fixed machine**. It couldn't be changed. However, now we know that the brain has the *ability to change continuously* throughout an individual's lifetime. This is referred to as **neuroplasticity**. In fact, your brain changes every time you think.

Consider how you would learn to play the guitar. As you play the G chord, your brain sends a signal to your fingers telling them what to do. As that signal moves from neuron to neuron, those activated nerve cells start to form connections. **This is because neurons that fire together, wire together**. As a result, these newly connected neurons form a pathway.

This pathway is like a path in the woods. Every time someone walks the trail, **it gets more established**. Similarly, every time a signal travels down a pathway of neurons, the pathway gets more established.

Pornography has the ability to literally change your brain by creating these pathways as you watch it. Whether it's *your lover* or *your laptop*, you are creating neurological pathways that change your brain.

What am I saying? **As you watch pornography, you are wiring your brain to respond sexually to images on a screen.**

In his book, *Wired for Intimacy*, neuroscientist William Struthers says, "With repeated sexual acting out in the absence of a partner, a man will be bound and attached to the image and not a person."

That's right, a porn-affected brain can come to prefer pornography *over* sex.

Why do men turn to *virtual* porn rather than *actual* sex?

In the book *The Brain That Changes Itself*, Dr. Norman Doidge talks about two pleasure systems in the brain: the *exciting-pleasure* system and the *satisfying-pleasure* system. The first deals with *anticipation*, while the second deals with *satisfaction*.

During anticipation, *dopamine* is released. Dopamine is a neurochemical associated with feelings of euphoria, bliss, motivation, and concentration. It's called the "feel-good hormone" for a reason.

Internet pornography—with its endless images of one digital woman after another—provides **bursts of dopamine** in the brain with each *new* image. The brain is constantly ramped into higher levels of excitement.

As time goes on, pornography users **need more dopamine** to get the same feeling—the same high. **What does that sound like?** Drug users! Consequently, they need more **new** images and **new** variety of images to get aroused.

Listen to me: The porn-affected brain is addicted to *novelty*, not sex. New naked women. New unrealistic scenarios. New sexual positions. This is why men will spend hours scrolling through hundreds of images at a time.

That why real women cannot complete.

The good news is, **neuroplasticity works both ways**. If porn pathways *and* high hormone levels aren't reinforced, they'll eventually disappear. The brain that changes due to porn can change back.

So pornography harms the individual—the brain.

## The Heart

Pornography doesn't just affect the brain. It also affects *the heart*. That is, it changes **how we relate to other people**.

Being human is about being in relationship. We were made to be in relationship with each other and our Maker. Sadly, pornography affects the ways we think and act towards other people.

**Pornography hurts relationships in many ways.** For example, many men—who have an addiction to pornography—are having trouble becoming aroused by their wife. Some claim to no longer be sexually attracted to them.

The work of a Nobel Prize winning biologist Nikolaas Tinbergen can help explain why. Tinbergen discovered that male butterflies are attracted to the colour, pattern, and shape of the female's wings. He then made cardboard wings that were bigger and brighter than nature ever would and introduced them into the butterfly's habitat. He called these cardboard cutouts a "supernormal stimuli."

He discovered that the male butterflies were more attracted to and tried to mate with the cardboard cutouts—**the supernormal stimuli**. And the male butterflies showed no interest in the *real* female butterflies—the normal stimuli.

Now think about how your brain works. World-renowned researchers and clinical psychologists, Drs. John and Julie Gottman write,

"Pornography may be just such a supernormal stimulus. With pornography use, much more of a normal stimulus may eventually be needed to achieve the response a supernormal stimulus evokes. *In contrast, ordinary levels of the stimulus are no longer interesting.*

This may be how normal sex becomes much less interesting for porn users. The data supports this conclusion. ***In fact, use of pornography by one partner leads the couple to have far less sex and ultimately reduces relationship satisfaction.***

I've heard of couple's using pornography to help **spruce up their sex life**. The irony is, **pornography ruins sex**.

It leads to a **lack of desire** for sex with one's partner. In fact, in some cases, it can lead to porn-induced erectile dysfunction. A 2012 study found that **30% of men ages 18-24** suffer from erectile dysfunction.

Pornography affects how we *view* others. We should love people and use things.

But pornography teaches men (and women) to treat women as objects for their own personal pleasure. Pornography lies to us. It teaches the lie that all women want sex all the time. It teaches the lie that women like all sex acts. It teaches the lie that women who don't want sex can be persuaded **by force**. Sadly, young boys and girls are buying into these lies.

Relationships are hard work. They involve caring for the other person, serving the other person, getting to know the other person. There is a give-and-take interaction. But pornography is about *convenience*. It's one-sided. The other person exists for your gratification.

Pornography is **not** about *intimate connection*; it's about *immediate gratification*. It's about me, me, me. It's narcissistic.

Gail Dines, author of *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, says, "When they put 'porn' into Google, they get catapulted into a world of sexual violence, degradation, and dehumanization. I think it has a terrible impact on the way they think about sexuality, intimacy, and connection."

Sex is apart of God's design. It is designed for long-term romantic relationships. It's designed to bring us *closer* to together. Pornography destroys that.

If you want a healthy relationship, *run from pornography* like it's a plague. There's a reason why Paul says, "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

## **Now What?**

Much more could be said about pornography's negative effects. Even so, I've given you a lot of bad news. So, what do we do about all this?

Let me talk to parents (and grandparents) first. You need to come to terms with the fact that your kids *will* see porn. It's not a matter of "if," it's a matter of "when." It's better to be *proactive* rather than *reactive*.

**First, teach your kids what pornography is and how to respond when they see it.** Most parents *assume* pornography is out of reach for their kids. The problem is, this isn't true. A lot of research has been done on *when* kids are first exposed to pornography. For example, in 2016, the Australian Institute of Family Studies found, "Nearly half of children between the ages of 9–16 experience regular exposure to sexual images."

Many kids are addicted to pornography **before** they hit their teens. This should be a **wake-up call to parents**. Fortunately, there are good books to help parents talk to their kids about this. For example, *Good Pictures Bad Pictures Jr.* by Kristen Jenson helps you protect your young kids from pornography addiction by preparing them to **recognize** pornography, **realize** its dangers, and **respond** in a safe way.

**Second, install monitoring and filtering software on all of your devices.** Covenant Eyes is a good one. But there are others. This allows you to know what your kids are looking at. It will help you monitor your kid's online footprints and emails it to you.

Also, get a good filtering software that will block certain websites from coming on your devices. Parents, we need to get more tech-savvy. There are great resources to help you do this.

**Third, teach your kids about sex.** The primary place kids are getting sex education is not school or their parents. It's pornography. We need to change that.

**Fourth, invite candid conversations.** You need to be seen as a reliable source of information. If they have a word they don't understand, they go to you, not Google. You need to be seen as someone your child can talk to about anything.

**Fifth, model real love.** This is a big one. Parents, kiss and hug in front of your kids. Gross them out. Give compliments. Go on dates. They need to see what real intimacy looks like. The way to spot a counterfeit is by knowing what the real thing looks like. Father, model for your sons how to treat a lady and model for your daughters how a gentlemen should treat them.

Now let me talk to those being affected by pornography. These are in no particular order.

**First, tell someone.** "Pornography addiction thrives in the darkness of secrecy; it cannot survive in the light of accountability." Be sure to acknowledge the wrong. Don't shift the blame. Own your actions. We need to start talking about this. Tell someone.

**Second, ask for forgiveness.** Husband, you have *wronged* your wives. And you have sins against God. Go to both and ask for forgiveness **so that healing can begin**.

**Third, be accountable.** You need help. You can't do this on your own. So find men that you can talk to. This is why Celebrate Recovery exists. And, please, get filtering software and accountability software, like CovenantEyes or X3Watch.

**Fourth, identify your triggers.** Is it sexualized music or magazines or movies? Is it depression or being alone at night? Try to identify what triggers you and do your best to respond to and avoid those triggers.

**Fifth, ask for help.** Talk to a councillor. That goes for your spouse too. Some wives even suffer similar symptoms to PTSD when they find out about a husband's porn use. They feel betrayed. They feel like trust has been broken. So get help. Ask God for help. Pray for God to intervene in your situation and to help set you free from addiction.

God forgives and heals those affected by pornography. Pornography is **not** the worst sin. In fact, it's not even the worst sexual sin. But it is a sin. And it leads to death.

**James 1:15** – Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Death to my identity, death to my relationship, death to my marriage, death to my relationship with God.

The culture may condone pornography as *normal* and the church may condemn pornography as *shameful*. But Christ comes and cleanses, heals, and restores, and gives you life *eternal*.

In a room this size, there are probably many men and women who struggle with this issue. I'd like to close by praying for you.

Father in Heaven, we thank you for your Son's shed blood on our behalf. Because of His death and resurrection, we know that "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This means—by your grace—we are forgiven of all of sin. Help us to confess our sins because when we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

We are no longer slaves to sin. If the Son sets us free, then we will be free indeed. Help us to live in *that* freedom day-by-day with your resurrection power.

We know it is your will that we abstain from sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:3). Help us grow in purity and sanctification, and not give into temptation. Deliver us from the evil one. We know that apart from you we can do nothing. We need you. On our own strength, we fail. By with your strength, all things are possible.

Father, we thank you that we have been crucified with Christ. And that it is no longer us who live, but Christ who lives in us. And the life we now live in the flesh we live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us. Thank you Lord for this precious truth. Help us live in it.

You are a good God. You are compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. Remind me daily that you *do not* treat us as our sins deserve or repay to us according to our iniquities. For as far as the east is from the west, so far have you removed our transgressions from us.

May our lives always, whether in public or in private, bring glory to your name and to your son. Amen.