

## Chapter Six: Pornography: Why is This Subject Here?

1. If you have not encountered this issue in your personal or dating life, consider yourself extremely fortunate. One study recommends wisely, “When couples decide to work on their relationship issues, pornography needs to be approached thoughtfully. Couples need to understand each other’s beliefs and attitudes. If there are major gaps in how they view pornography, it is going to be difficult to discuss sexuality and the relationship in general without coming to some consensus about those conflicts... couples may also differ in whether they see porn use as infidelity. One person may see themselves as being innocent of any transgression, while the other feels betrayed.”<sup>1</sup> In general, people can get very defensive, even combative, about this issue. It’s particularly so with men. Understanding and mastering this issue before initiating any relationship is an intelligent thing to do.

2. The effects of this serious, social issue are profoundly evident in the behavior of men and women alike. One SA director (Sexaholics Anonymous) describes the common effects in men as sounding like, “I no longer feel an emotional response to anything,” “There is nothing in my life I enjoy doing,” “I feel totally isolated from the world,” “My anxiety and stress levels are at an all-time high.”<sup>2</sup> After a 10-year battle herself, one girl relates that “pornography is our mind-warping way to find emotional and physical fulfillment in a past incident between strangers we see on a screen. People become like objects. Relationships become a cesspit of using, abuse, self-gratification, temporariness, and substitutions. Monogamy seems less than fulfilling.”<sup>3</sup>

3. The latest evidence of the toxic effects of pornography is astounding.<sup>4</sup> This is exactly why this subject was suddenly inserted, particularly in the early stages of dating. It is not something that can be overlooked, especially as the negative consequences grow in long-term relationships. How does it affect people exactly?<sup>5</sup> Let’s list out a few examples:

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<sup>1</sup> Grant Hillary Brenner, “*When is Porn Use a Problem?*”, February 19, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/experimentations/201802/when-is-porn-use-problem>.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Tolley, *10 Toxic Side Effects from Pornography Use*, <https://www.familytoday.com/relationships/10-toxic-side-effects-of-pornography-use>.

<sup>3</sup> Sheila Wray Gregoire, “*Top 10 Things to Know About Women and Porn Addiction*,” May 24, 2016, <https://tolovehonorandvacuum.com/2016/05/women-porn-addiction>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.covenanteyes.com> for all the latest statistics on pornography.

<sup>5</sup> Scott Christian, “*10 Reasons Why You Should Quit Watching Porn*,” November 20, 2013, <https://www.gq.com/story/10-reasons-why-you-should-quit-watching-porn>.

- Pornography conditions the viewer to expect constant sexual novelty, so arousal generally declines with the same mate. Only those who regularly found different mates were able to continue their arousal.
- Those who watch pornography regularly admit to feeling dominated by their own sexual desires.
- Studies show that the brains of pornography addicts look exactly like those of drug addicts. This is now common knowledge.
- Other typical negative effects: premature ejaculation, disinterest in sex with their partner, difficulty reaching orgasm, and erectile dysfunction.

4. The objectification of another person for one's personal gratification is the direct opposite of love. Love is the heart of any healthy relationship. Do not underestimate the *pornification* of the culture and its effects, directly or indirectly, in your life.

5. If one is currently struggling with pornography, it is very likely that he/she will fall into one of two categories. The first category is that one believes that he/she will be able to quit whenever they please or that if not now, at some point in the future, maybe once you are in a relationship or married. The second category is one who already believes that he/she must quit and have tried and failed to stop many times. They are now dealing with all the shame and guilt that comes along with it. If you belong to the first group and believe that there is no problem or that you will stop later, then **do it!** Go six months without using. Most will probably not last a week. If one can, great! Count yourself fortunate and take stock. Is your life better, has your emotional state improved or confidence increased? If one cannot stop, then he/she will soon find themselves a member of the second group.

6. Belonging to the second category means one honestly wants to be free. Please be kind to yourself. It is truly one of the great tragedies of our time that so many must suffer from this addiction. Please take hope in these words of former addict Matt Talbot: "Never be too hard on the man who can't give up, it's as hard to give up drink as it is to raise the dead to life again. But both are possible and even easy for our Lord. We have only to depend on him."

## The Facts

1. There is a great deal of controversy from medical professionals on where compulsion ends and addiction begins. Regardless, people can suffer with any form of exposure to pornography and, whether addiction or compulsion, people still need help. Pornography is also not just a "guy thing"; more women than ever are viewing it. One of the world's most popular free sites, Pornhub, which is visited by 115 million people per day, recently revealed that women make up a *quarter* of its global audience. The data shows that, for women, watching pornography is mostly a solo adventure and that it goes down

considerably once in a long-term relationship.<sup>6</sup> Whether you stay with this person or not, you will be helping them, and, in most cases, you are helping one another just by talking about it.

2. Here are a few facts from 2018<sup>7</sup> about pornography that undermine the development of love in dating (or really any relationship):

- 90% of teens and 96% of young adults are either encouraging, accepting, or neutral when they talk about pornography with their friends.
- 51% of male students and 32% of female students first viewed pornography before their teenage years.
- The first age of exposure to pornography on average for both boys and girls is around 13 years old.
- 56% of divorces involved one party having an obsessive interest in pornography.

**Striking words from celebrated Author and Feminist, Naomi Wolf:**

*“The young women who talk to me on campuses about the effect of pornography on their intimate lives speak of feeling that they can never measure up, that they can never ask for what they want; and that if they do not offer what porn offers, they cannot expect to hold a guy. The young men talk about what it is like to grow up learning about sex from porn, and how it is not helpful to them in trying to figure out how to be with a real woman... For the first time in human history, the images’ power and allure have supplanted that of real naked women. Today, real naked women are just bad porn.”*

3. Pornography use is difficult to hide. Here are some signs that might indicate a possible struggle:<sup>8</sup>

- Defensiveness or anger when asked about the subject.
- Becoming physically aggressive and pushing physical boundaries.
- Not letting you see their phone when asked; the search engine is frequently clean.
- Nervous reactions when you surprise them and they are on their phone.

<sup>6</sup> Dawn Michael, “Why Women are Watching More Porn Than Ever Before,” January 31, 2018, <https://www.yourtango.com/experts/dawnmichael/women-watch-porn-fantasies>.

<sup>7</sup> Covenant Eyes, <https://www.covenanteyes.com>.

<sup>8</sup> Northpoint Washington, “11 Signs You May Be Addicted to Pornography,” May 27, 2019, <https://www.northpointwashington.com/blog/11-signs-may-addicted-porn>.

- Strongly reacting to roommates that open the bedroom door unexpectedly.
- Noticeably distracted; often irritable or moody.
- The completion of other vital life tasks is not happening. It appears that something is interfering with normal daily activity.

## When Do We Have This Conversation?

1. Some say right away, others say give it some time. One way to gauge that moment is when *consistent* behavior on both sides indicates: “I am *very* interested in you and I want you to know me.” **Trust** is the bedrock of a good relationship. With porn use, like any substance abuse disorder, minimizing the issue and dishonesty are often the norm and quite often include duplicitous behavior (a double life) which kills trust.

2. Each person needs to determine the timeline of this conversation depending on how strongly you feel about the issue. This book advocates that the conversation should happen *earlier* rather than later. Nonetheless, let’s be crystal clear: **this subject MUST be addressed at some point in a dating relationship.**

3. Due to the shame that comes with this behavior, it is not going to be on the “Top 10” list of desired conversations. However, it is crucial that it comes up. Most men, for example, will be reluctant to bring this subject up unless forced to.<sup>9</sup> Besides this, if they are asked to give specifics, they *might avoid details or minimize the issue altogether*. Most people minimize the issue in their life and are not completely open.

4. Given the sensitive nature of the theme, and to avoid putting the other in a situation of possible dishonesty, here are some ideas to help broach the subject:

- Possible opening line: *“Hey, I need to know where you are on the topic of pornography. I want to make sure we are helping one another.”*
- This manner of initiating the theme assumes that it *is* an issue. Right now, the statistics are in favor of this assumption so why not just “put it out there?” You are making a judgment on what healthy human behavior is and *not* necessarily judging the other person. Avoiding a judgmental spirit cannot be stressed enough because of the hypersensitivity of shame around this struggle.
- If either party (or both) admits *“Yes, I have had issues,”* then how can one “interpret” such a yes without more invasive questioning? Questions like, “” *“how*

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<sup>9</sup> Men, in particular, can’t fathom how talking about it will help. They think that any mention of it as a problem will end the relationship; that they will not be accepted but rejected.

*long have you struggled with it,” “how frequently does it happen,” and “what is the current status” are all very valid questions but can become too accusatory in tone and shut down openness.*

- *“Yes, I have issues,” as in, “right now I am battling with it.” could mean one of two things: a) “yes I am addicted” or b) “yes I have a compulsion to use it.”*
- *“Yes, I had issues, but not so much now”. This also can mean many things but usually either: a) “I fell often in the past but now less frequently, maybe every month or so” or b) “I looked at pornography in the past, but now I haven’t fallen in a long time (like months).”*
- *Either response above merits two very important follow-up questions: “What are you (or we) doing right now to overcome it?” and “How can I help you?”*

## **Key Signs of True Sincerity in Overcoming the Issue**

1. To the possible responses given above, it is vital to be able to recognize whether there is a sincere intention to overcome this issue. Bottom line: **Sincerity** must translate into “action” not empty promises or even good intentions. The person or couple needs to show the other that they are taking steps to overcome the struggle. If one cannot point to concrete things that he or she has done to address this issue, then they are deceiving themselves. The person in question needs to be accountable *to someone*.<sup>10</sup> All too often a person battling with such issues has made “solemn” promises that “today will be the last day,” that they “will never go back” only to fall again. If their method is not getting them the desired results, it means that they need to try something new. One will be able to tell if their solution is working or not within a short period of time.

2. That someone is preferably not the questioning party (as if they are some sort of therapist or counselor) because this can cause more harm than good. Repeatedly listening to your significant other about this issue (essentially that they were desiring someone else) will literally tear the other apart. It will be important that they do speak to someone, but, if the revelations cause pain, it will be more difficult for them to be honest. Remember, we are in a dating relationship. This is not marriage. You have no obligation to remain dating the person. Does one completely abandon the other? Of course not. The conversation and efforts made up to this point are meant to encourage honesty in a true spirit of kindness and compassion.

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<sup>10</sup> It is recommended that, if you are dating or married to someone who struggles with this issue, it is best that your significant other is not the accountability partner. They should know about the issue and when you fall. However, it is suggested that the person in question have a friend who is of the same sex to hold them accountable.

3. Forms of accountability are common practice for all recovery treatments. Here are some questions illustrating some forms of accountability:

- Do they have some protection on their phone/tablet/computer that blocks such undesirable exposure? What needs to take place to make this happen?
- Is there anyone in their life (besides you) that knows they struggle with this and wants to help them? (This is based on the wise principle that an honest open confession with others brings peace and the confidence to seek help).
- Are they part of any small group with others to help them stay honest with themselves? (This can take the form of an Sexaholics Anonymous group, book study, bible study, prayer group, sports team, etc.)
- If this has been going on for a while, have they sought out professional help?<sup>11</sup>
- What kind of spiritual support have they received? (For Catholics: prayer, confession, spiritual direction).

If you have discussed this theme openly, then a period of time should be allowed for one to prove their sincerity in overcoming the issue. A concrete plan is important.



## When is Enough Enough? When This Issue Ends the Relationship

1. One important fact to remember is that healing this addiction takes time and a lot of hard work. Very rarely does the change come from just saying, “*I will stop.*” Besides this, the response, “*I used to have a problem*” (but not anymore), comes with the clear caveat that it is quite likely that they will fall again. This is the *nature of the beast*. Human nature often brings us back to our “puddle” of misery. Hence, this is why it is so important to see concrete steps being taken to overcome the issue. Otherwise, it is truly just wishful thinking. One should withdraw from further physical and emotional advancement if the other is not making progress.

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Eleven for resources on this issue and others.

## 2. Should you consider marrying someone who has a pornography issue?<sup>12</sup>

Trust is the hallmark of any good relationship, particularly one such as marriage. This type of commitment is too important and exclusive to accept anything less. To enter into a marriage with a man or woman who's cultivating desires for someone beyond the one who they are with or married to is simply too dangerous. The need to be in a relationship with a man or woman who is cultivating exclusive desires for you is key to renewing trust. The following signs are a clear indication that there is a real insincerity in overcoming the problem:

- If the conversation on this issue seems to get frequently deflected or downplayed.
- If you are catching them in repeated lies.<sup>13</sup>
- If the troubling signs mentioned above continue to appear in their behavior.
- If none of the forms of accountability mentioned are in place in the person's life after a reasonable period of time has passed.

3. After an agreed amount of time has passed, if any of these signs above are present, in most cases it will spell insincerity. Studies show that if such insincerity goes unchecked, the problem will only get worse. If they cannot own this issue with honesty and openness toward you **now** while you are dating, it is quite likely this pattern of behavior will continue even into marriage. It will, perhaps, show up in other important issues as well. This will only sow distrust which is devastating to any relationship.

4. Given the current crisis of love, it is also important to name the extreme opposite to life-giving love: self-eroticism. Masturbation is the attempt to find pleasure and happiness in oneself alone rather than with others. While it seems to be "natural," studies show that masturbation can become highly addictive and create personal alienation, self-loathing, a depletion of one's interpersonal skills, and is dangerous to one's overall health.<sup>14</sup> Along with a cultural epidemic, such as pornography, comes the mentality that somehow this isolated act doesn't hurt anyone. This is false. Since *love is relational*, and relationships involve more than one person, one's personal choices do

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<sup>12</sup> Would you marry someone who has an alcohol issue? A drug issue? If you're a slave to anything, then you are not free enough to give the best of yourself to your spouse. You need to break free first before you can consider taking on deeper commitments like marriage.

<sup>13</sup> If you choose to stay in the relationship, the only response to chronic lying is to demand that they see a therapist or give some real proof that they are seeing one.

<sup>14</sup> Jason Vredenburg, Performance Insiders, "What are the Side Effects of Excessive Masturbation?", February 20, 2019, <https://www.performanceinsiders.com/excessive-masturbation-side-effects.html>. One example is erectile dysfunction. Thirty million men suffer from it. There are many causes of erectile dysfunction and one of them is excess masturbation.

not affect just one individual, but the entire vista of who we are and with whom we relate (self, family, and community).<sup>15</sup>

**5.** The sexual function of the human body is meant by God to be enjoyed in "the total meaning of mutual self-giving"<sup>16</sup> within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. No evidence shows that masturbation prepares an adolescent or young adult for the complete gift of self in marriage or any other state in life. In fact, the self-referential, fantasy-driven nature of masturbation damages the ability to move beyond oneself and enter into mature self-giving. How can any of this be healthy for dating which should be centered on the ability to trust in healthy loving relationships?

## **How Does Pornography Affect the Other? Reflections of a Wife About the Addiction of Her Husband<sup>17</sup>**

**1. "It makes us feel like we are not enough."** As women, the world is constantly telling us we're not enough – not thin enough, not curvy enough, not pretty enough, not sexy enough, not sweet enough... the list goes on and on. So, when you seek out other women through pornography, you make us feel like we are not enough for you, the man we chose to spend the rest of our life with. This pain is so, so deep for a woman. It's the pain of feeling totally rejected and unloved.

**2. "It makes us feel like we are an object."** If you can use women on a computer screen to pleasure yourself, then we inherently feel that's all we are to you as well – an object for your selfish desires. This robs us of our human dignity and makes marital intimacy impossible.

**3. "It hurts the whole family."** When you use pornography, it changes your personality and subconscious thoughts. I found out in my husband's disclosure that the times he was sunk deepest in pornography matched up with the times he related to me in self-centered, negative ways. In other words, you are deceiving yourself if you think you are not hurting anyone.

**4. "The deepest pain is the betrayal."** Worse than the pornography itself is the betrayal and the lies you tell us to cover it up. How can I explain this pain in a way that a man can understand? Here's an analogy: I would assume that you would never physically hit your wife, right? Well, that is the emotional equivalent of betrayal for a woman. Just because you can't see the bruises doesn't mean they aren't there.

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<sup>15</sup> Connor LC, *Reclaiming Love*, 85.

<sup>16</sup> CCC, 2352.

<sup>17</sup> The comments were offered here to help the reader see the gravity of this issue.

Unfortunately, in my case, my husband's betrayal is so deep that he has emotionally hit me repeatedly to the point where I have been beaten into an emotional pulp.

