

CHAPTER 1

The “Culture” of Pornography

Pornography is one of the leading industries in America, and statistics show that 90% of people in the world are addicted to it. And just in case you were wondering, I did mean to slap you in the face with that statistic. It is our reality. At that rate, the likelihood is that nearly every other person in the room you are sitting in is addicted to and/or knows someone addicted to pornography. In hindsight, it makes sense if you think about it. Social media is the hub for sexual stimuli providing easy access to half-dressed—if not naked—women and men, (live, on video, and via photo) begging for likes, and desperately seeking validation. Today, more than ever, people are driven to social media to fulfill sexual appetites, just like those who seek pornography for sexual gratification. The stimulus received from the idea of acceptance on social media is arguably the same stimulus we receive when we watch pornography.

Here are two statistics you may not know: Pornography accounts for 25% of all internet searches and is the fourth leading reason for internet use. Shocking statistics considering most people of God refuse to acknowledge and/or accept their own experience or their loved ones' experiences with pornography. I believe this to be true because, once we deliver ourselves from it, we believe that it is as easy for others to battle and overcome this issue as it was for ourselves. Unfortunately, that is not always true.

What is true is that pornography is an addiction that attacks the brain just as any other drug. The sexual peak achieved while watching pornography releases dopamine in the brain like most other addictive and abused substances. It is indeed an addiction. And just like any other drug, those addicted continue to watch it and endure prolonged consequences to the brain. Pornography addicts develop a compulsive desire to seek and watch pornography despite the consequences. Their tolerance of it increases (which makes them want it more), and they lose the ability to control the need or urge to watch it. It becomes a cycle of addiction that is inevitably hard to battle.

Additionally, the accessibility of pornography hampers our confidence when we try to have those courageous conversations with our children about “the birds and the bees.” Quite frankly, if you haven’t had a conversation about sex with your child before he or she gets to elementary school, I can guarantee you, it’s already too late. That may be hard for most parents to accept. But if you have recently watched any show on any network with your child under five years of age (with the exception of maybe PBS), chances are you observed sexual innuendoes and content even in the G-rated television shows. And just to show you I’m not kidding; I will be honest about my first encounter with pornography.

I was in the third grade—merely eight years old—when I came across a TV show after hours that showed pornographic images. I remember as a child we had a descrambler on our cable box. For those who may not know, a descrambler allows you to get all cable channels. It would be something similar to a Fire Stick today.

While I was flipping through the channel, I came across the images. I clearly knew it wasn’t right because I remember turning around to make sure no one was watching me from behind. While watching, my body started to respond to what my eyes were seeing (increase in core temperature, for example), so I turned off the TV. I couldn’t describe what I was feeling but knew something wasn’t right. As I returned to bed, I recall being consumed with thoughts of what I had seen well into the next day.

When I got home from school the following day, I returned to the channel when no was looking. I know we like to rationalize children’s behavior by saying “they don’t know any better.” But my experience challenges that notion. At the

tender age of eight, I was able to connect the device to my television that allowed me to watch channels unfiltered.

We shouldn't assume that our children, who are growing up in an age of advanced technology, don't know how to access inappropriate sites and channels. I can promise you they do. Not only can they view inappropriate websites and television channels/shows, but they can also keep you from knowing that they are watching them.

Despite my experience and the consequences and negative effects we know to be true, statistics show that pornography is increasingly more accepted by Americans every year. In 2018, approximately 43% of Americans believe that pornography is morally acceptable.¹ To further exacerbate the dilemma, it doesn't cost any money making it easily available to the masses. Some have postulated that pornography does not have the same effects on the physical body as other drugs; they claim it is not a disease.

I asked the youth of my congregation if they watched porn. The general consensus was, "Yes." When asked if there was anything wrong with it, the overwhelming answer was, "No!" Some of the young men went as far as to say that pornography was safer than sex because you couldn't get an STD or get anyone pregnant.

In college, I was not lured by marijuana, alcohol, or any other drug. I never indulged any of those things; but I was heavily addicted to pornography. I couldn't say it then, but I actually looked down on my friends for using marijuana and other drugs because I didn't realize that pornography was just as much of an addiction as anything they were doing. I justified my addiction to pornography because I didn't feel there was anything wrong with it, just like those young men in my congregation. But, my addiction to porn led to an addiction to women and sex.

My obsession with sex reached its peak in my college years. I developed an increasing desire to have multiple sexual partners, which led to a compulsion to replicate the images I had been exposed to in pornographic videos. If you

¹ Publish June 5, 2018 by Gallup. Reference: Gallup <https://news.gallup.com/poll/235280/americans-say-pornography-morally-acceptable.aspx>

believe that what happens when you are single is alleviated when you get married, I am here to tell you that you're totally wrong. I learned the hard way that every experience in life follows you, and all negative behavior—left unaddressed—remains in your psyche. Sadly, the walk down the aisle does not create a clean slate.

My addiction followed me from college to graduate school and into my marriage. But I, like many, thought that marriage would heal me from my addiction. I led myself to believe that watching porn would reduce my actual sexual partners. However, I didn't realize that my body had become adapted to this habit. I neglected to understand the long-lasting effects and consequences my addiction would have on my life. I went into my marriage with this dependence on porn failing to address it before I walked down the aisle.

I was married to a beautiful woman who possessed all of the qualities I desired. Yet, my addiction wouldn't allow for her to be enough. Did she deserve the repercussions of my addiction? Absolutely not! I found myself in a crisis. I had to figure out a way to close myself off from attacks from the enemy that threatened the health of my marriage. But it wasn't easy. Despite how wrong I knew pornography to be, it had become so embedded in my life and in American culture, I didn't realize how desensitized to intimacy I had become.

A leading complaint I hear from married couples is, "We are not having sex." Have you ever noticed how the enemy does everything in his power to stop sex within the marriage while doing everything in his power to encourage sex before or outside of marriage?

Many women view the sexual desires of men as a compulsion and withhold sex to provoke desired behavior. But sex is meant to be a healthy component of marriage. When one partner starves the other of affection, they encourage the search to find other means of fulfilling that desire. I believe that this is one of the ways the addiction to pornography manifests.

A prolonged consequence for those addicted to pornography is that they become less and less aroused naturally. It becomes more challenging for them to find their own spouse or mate attractive. Think about that for a moment. Imagine that your spouse, if he or she is addicted, ultimately desires porn more than he or she desires you. In that case, it's no surprise the rate at which marriages fail due to infidelity and apathy. This can also explain why some

spouses require more from their partners sexually. It's a hard pill to swallow emotionally when we have to accept that our spouse may not desire to engage in sex with us at all because pornography has taken the place of intimacy.

So how did I tackle my pornography addiction? It is best explained by a short video clip I showed to my congregation. The video detailed how the brain has a "use it or lose it" quality. It showed that the parts of your brain you use grow stronger, and those parts left unstimulated or ignored are weakened.

The video compared lack of use of the brain to lack of use of limbs. After sitting idle for long periods, muscles have to be retrained. Muscles and joints stiffen and, ultimately, atrophy. Similarly, pornography has a deleterious effect on the brain. Prolonged exposure to porn weakens natural sexual desire. While there is capacity for recovery, it will require actively working to retrain the brain by finding positive stimuli to take the place of gratification brought by pornography.

What does that process look like? Step one is admitting that you can't do this "recovery" thing on your own. Depending on the level of your addiction, this can be embarrassing because you likely don't want to talk to anyone about it. But your willingness to seek recovery will be exemplified in your willingness to acknowledge the problem.

Step two is identifying the core of the pain. This means discovering what it is that triggers you. For example, those places of insecurity, depression, anxiety, or fear should be confronted to discover the source of your dependence. What makes you find comfort in negative behavior? Perhaps it is the fear that your husband or wife will leave you or reject you. Whatever it may be, you cannot lean on assumptions. You must be willing to be transparent and challenge yourself to be honest.

That brings us to step three: being honest about where you really are. When you identify where you are, you can identify vices and restructure your day to avoid them. Remove all of the vices and images that trigger you. I strongly recommend that you join a support group and get counseling. Though many of us like to think we can do it on our own, we need help to be able to identify those triggers and process the pain surrounding them.

Lastly, step four is don't judge. Married men and women should not judge their mates because of their addiction. It is not appropriate or helpful to finger-point. Playing the blame game is discouraging, especially because healing and recovery require understanding. 3 John 1:2 says:

“You shall prosper as your soul prospers.”

This means that when you rid yourself of those demonic strongholds inside you that have you stuck—those things keeping you in bondage—the Bible says that you will prosper. You will see the difference because the favor of God gravitates to you as your soul prospers.

