



Digital Pornography Addiction

*What you need to know
and where to find help*

by Timothy Allen

THRIVING
VALUES™

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INTRODUCTION

In October 2015, *Playboy* magazine made a stunning announcement: Beginning in March of 2016, the magazine that pioneered nudity to promote the sexual revolution would no longer feature fully nude women. Company executive Scott Flanders explained the change this way: “That battle has been fought and won” “You’re now one click away from every sex act imaginable for free. And so it’s just passé at this juncture.”

Pornography has come a long way from the first *Playboy* magazine in 1953. Gone are the days when boys would sneak a peek at provocative images in a glossy magazine, leaving the details up to the imagination. Today’s pornography draws the viewer into a world of real and simulated sex, altering their brains in the process. It starts with a single image.

An epidemic of pornography addiction is affecting teenagers and preteen children all over the world, while receiving very little notice from the media or medical community. Parents are unaware that their children can begin to struggle with this mind-altering addiction even before they are teenagers.

One static image, one racy online video, one inappropriate email—that’s all it takes to start them on the path of digital pornography addiction. As children who struggle with digital pornography grow up and realize they are unable to control the addiction, they feel ashamed and alone. They think there is no one they can talk to or get help from to break free from their addiction.

Digital pornography use is dangerous and damaging to children and teenagers. **Extended viewing is almost certain to have a lifelong impact on the way they see the opposite sex and their ability to form relationships with them.** Pornography leaves the brain wanting more; however, increased exposure to the graphic and violent nature often leaves viewers feeling ashamed and depressed, dulling their senses and making it more difficult for them to find pleasure in everyday life and normal relationships. For many, it’s a downward spiral.

“My life turned upside down this week. We discovered that our Christian, home-schooled 15-year-old son is hooked on Internet pornography.”

■ RACHEL, OHIO

“Last year my wife and I were shocked and devastated to discover that our teenage daughter had been accessing porn sites.”

■ JOHN, TEXAS

DIGITAL PORNOGRAPHY: TRULY MIND-ALTERING



Hormones are powerful chemicals secreted by the brain and various glands throughout the body. They are responsible for altering moods, influencing behaviors and causing our body to effect physical changes, as needed. For example, hormones are partially responsible for enjoyment of chocolate or other treats. When the tongue experiences something that the mind considers tasty, a series of chemical hormones are released that reward you for eating the item and create new neural pathways that encourage you to eat it again in the future.

Likewise, any image or video that creates a physical or emotional reaction can have a lasting impact on your brain. More than just a memory is formed with powerful imagery, such as pornography. In fact, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans have shown how the physical makeup of the brain and its response to hormones can change over time in response to pornographic images. Chemical hormones reward sexual activity, as part of God's plan to encourage intimacy and procreation. In essence, pornography tricks the brain into providing these chemical rewards without the actual closeness, intimacy or relationship:

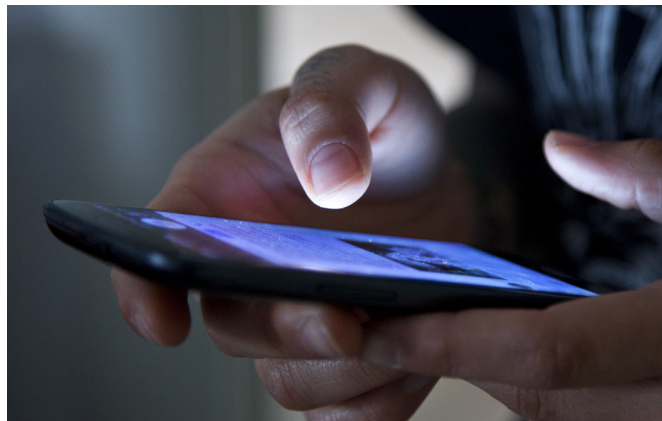
- When viewing pornography, the hormone **dopamine** is released into the brain. This hormone is responsible for creating cravings.
- **Oxytocin** and **vasopressin** are two other hormones that are released by sex or viewing pornography. These hormones are responsible for altering neurophysiology, laying down neural pathways of memory and associating them with any pleasurable sensations that we feel.
- **Endorphins** are also released by the brain. These are the body's natural version of opiate drugs, capable of giving the sensations of feeling high and euphoric.
- Finally, the natural hormone **serotonin** is released, which brings the sense of calm and relaxation after sexual intimacy.

"Just this past week my husband and I discovered that our son has developed a sexual addiction. He is only in his early teens. Horror, anger, sadness and heartbreak overwhelmed me."

■ LORI, SOUTH CAROLINA

In normal sexual relationships, these hormones and brain-pattern changes help humans bond to each other by rewarding continued and increased contact. In healthy relationships, this desire/reward system reaches a limit, preventing obsession and allowing you to spend time away from your spouse without negative effects. However, viewing pornography bypasses these normal limits, and addiction and obsession are commonplace results. **The mind is chemically altered to believe that sexual satisfaction merely requires a keyboard and search terms rather than the complexities of courtship and a loving relationship with another human being.**

As with any addiction, the mind eventually requires more excitement, danger and abnormal scenes, in order to achieve arousal and satisfaction. This is because viewers of pornography are able to seek satisfaction on demand without the normal barriers of a spouse's schedule, energy level or mood. Very quickly, their minds become accustomed to the once-normal levels of hormones, and now they require something more in order to become aroused. *Before pornography viewers realize it, their brain has been rewired to the point where the effort of cultivating and maintaining a normal relationship isn't worth it.* Pornographic films do not show relationships, they only show sex so the brain will disassociate sexual satisfaction from a loving relationship.



their spouses, preferring the solitude of their keyboard and monitor. Pornography is what their brain now requires before the pleasurable hormones will affect them. This is a physical demand from their mind—not an emotional or rational choice.

"We've never before raised a generation of boys with full, unfettered access to porn."

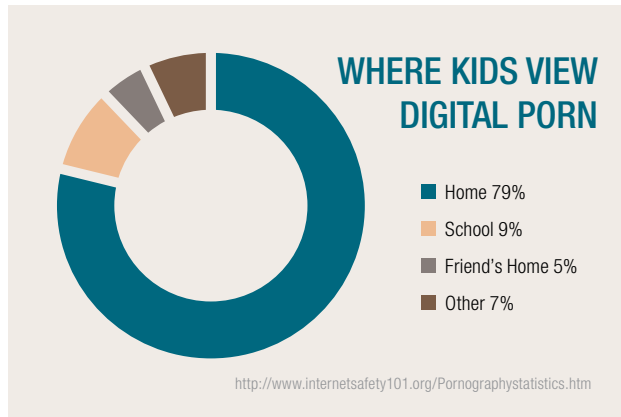
■ GAIL DINES, AUTHOR

Additionally, normal sexual outcomes are unsatisfying and disappointing if a pornography addict's partner isn't willing to engage in the extreme acts they have seen online. Married individuals who are addicted to pornography often avoid intimacy with

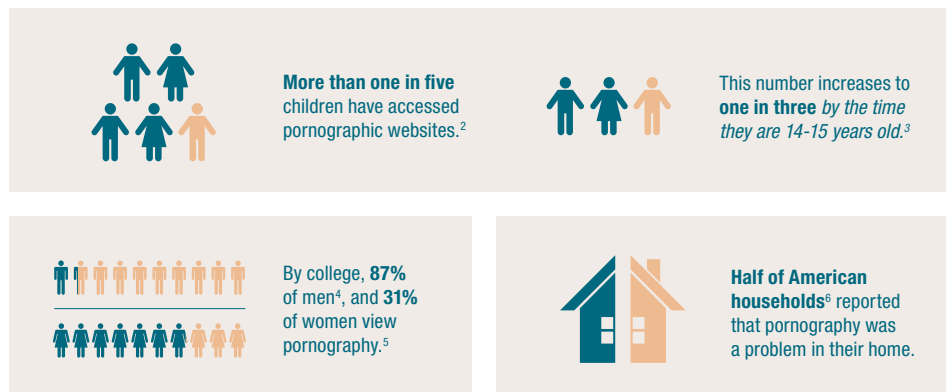
WHO IS AFFECTED?

Seventy percent of boys and twenty-three percent of girls have spent more than 30 consecutive minutes looking at online pornography on at least one occasion. It doesn't take much to lure a preteen or teen child into his or her first pornographic image: A single text message

with a link or a pop-up ad could usher them in. Without monitoring, ad-blocking or accountability software installed on the home computer, tablet or smartphone, children are vulnerable to a vast library of carefully designed marketing snares into the world of online pornography, and most parents are unaware of what their children are viewing on their media devices.



STAGGERING STATISTICS



Children who view pornography often become trapped in an addictive cycle, which brain scans show is nearly identical to alcohol or heroin addiction. Individuals addicted to pornography exhibit the same cycle of abuse, including:

- Increased tolerance over time, requiring more viewing and more extreme pornography
- Loss of control and compulsive behavior
- Painful physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms when they attempt to stop viewing pornography
- Abnormal social behavior and difficulty forming normal relationships

The risk of addiction for teenage boys is particularly high, because the teenage brain's "reward pathway" is up to four times stronger than that of an adult brain. These young men are trapped by the lure of Internet pornography, as their brains are physically rewired to require sexual intimacy to match what they have seen in explicit films or violent images. Today's Internet pornography consists of brutal, degrading, body-punishing images designed to debase women. This directly affects how young viewers of pornography perceive their own sexuality and attitudes toward the opposite sex, and ***it greatly hampers or destroys the young viewers' ability to form healthy intimate relationships as they grow older.*** Young men expect women to perform debased acts and then get satisfaction from inflicting such abuse. Likewise, young girls assume what they see in pornography is appropriate sexual intimacy and that it reflects what men think of women. Victims of pornography addiction also suffer from physical issues, including various modes of sexual dysfunction.

"I am in my early twenties and I am about to get married. I've struggled with pornography my whole life. It burned me away inside. It felt very wrong. I tried [quitting] alone, and it didn't work."

■ GREGG, OREGON

HOW TO GET HELP

Parents who discover their teenager's pornography use are understandably upset, scared and worried. Uncovering the problem is the first step to recovery and a reason to be thankful. As with any abuse, identifying the problem is a requirement before healing can begin.

And, as with any addiction, those who have become addicted to pornography can break the cycle with the proper motivation and hard work. Professional counseling is strongly recommended. There are many accountability software programs available, some of which use an accountability partner to help coach a child or teen through the problem. An accountability partner should be someone trustworthy, who will not make the child feel ashamed if they fail on occasion while recovering. Instead, the accountability partner should gently guide the individual to identify what triggers caused the relapse and help them remove those triggers from their life. Limiting Internet usage to only what is required for work or school is also a proactive step.

"Focus on the Family and other Christian resources helped us stabilize and heal. It's been a long hard road, but we will soon have been married five years. I know Focus on the Family was a helper in this process. Thank you! I recommend Focus on the Family to everyone I can."

■ MANDY, TEXAS

COMMON WARNING SIGNS

Common “red flags” to look for regarding pornography viewing and addiction include:

- A demonstrated lack of empathy toward others
- Decreased performance in school and less interest in extracurricular activities
- Increased isolation from peers
- Acting secretive around computers and smartphones, including erasing browser history and adding extra password protection
- Spending large amounts of time alone in bedroom or bathroom with the door locked

Ministries such as **Focus on the Family** are actively engaged in providing support to families with members who struggle with pornography addiction using counseling, referrals and prayer.

Although many who struggle with addiction overcome it with the help of professional counseling, others manage with the love and support of friends and family. There are technological advances that can help to reduce or eliminate the possibility of exposure to Internet pornography before or after an addiction can occur. Programs such as **Net Nanny** offer to protect an entire family’s system of desktop computers, laptops, phones and tablets.

If you have questions about this topic or other culture-related issues, please contact us at ThrivingValues@Family.org. To speak with a caring Christian counselor, please call 1-800-A-FAMILY (232-6459) Monday through Friday between 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. (Mountain Time).

“Through our faith in Christ and after hearing many programs on Focus on the Family that encouraged forgiveness, [my husband] is now healed of this addiction. If we had listened to the world’s advice, we would be divorced. Instead, we’re now happily married after being together over 33 years!”

■ LISA, MICHIGAN

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1. <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2010/08/19/teens-and-porn-10-stats-your-need-to-know/>
 2. <http://www.internetsafety101.org/pornographystatistics.htm>
 3. <http://www.internetsafety101.org/pornographystatistics.htm>
 4. <http://www.teensafe.com/blog/web-pornography-addiction-affects-teenage-brain/>
 5. Ibid.
 6. <http://www.webroot.com/us/en/home/resources/tips/digital-family-life/internet-pornography-by-the-numbers>

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