

A PARENTS' PRIMER ON INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY

BY: WALT MUELLER, CPYU President

The Internet, mobile devices, and other digital technologies combine to create a world in which children and teens no longer have to look for and find pornography. Instead, pornography finds them.



Introduction

I was 12-years-old when I was first exposed to pornography. A neighborhood friend had found a magazine on the side of the road. He invited several of us to take a look. We spent half of our time looking over his shoulder at the glossy pictures. We spent the other half of our time looking over our own shoulders, hoping that we wouldn't get caught doing something that we all knew was wrong.

Fast-forward to today's world. The Internet, mobile devices, and other digital technologies combine to create a world in which children and teens no longer have to look for and find pornography. Now, pornography is in the mainstream and it finds them. And because pornography usually finds them long before they reach puberty, its life-long influence and effect can be even more deep-seated and devastating. This is why the U.S. Department of Justice issued this warning way back in 1996... long before children and teens

carried smartphones offering 24/7 Internet access: "Never before in the history of telecommunications media in the United States has so much indecent (and obscene) material been so easily accessible by so many minors and in so many American homes with so few restrictions."

As parents called by God to nurture our children through childhood and into a spiritually healthy adulthood, we have the responsibility to be keenly aware of pornography's presence, its compelling draw, and the impact it has on our kids. When it comes to pornography, what they see and experience now will not only shape them in the present, but will continue to influence them and their relationships for the rest of their lives. Consequently, we must be diligent in preparing our children to understand, process, and respond to this horribly fallen expression of God's good gift of sexuality in ways that bring honor and glory to God.





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At the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding (cpyu.org), we want to be a resource to help you help your children navigate the Digital Frontier in God-honoring ways. We believe that parental awareness and understanding are a first step towards crafting healthy and proactive parental responses. Your children will see pornography. What follows is an introduction to Internet pornography that we trust you will find helpful as you lead them through this dangerous and ever-present minefield.

DR. WALT MUELLER

President

Center for Parent/Youth Understanding

What is pornography?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "Pornography" as:

1. *the depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement*
2. *material (as books or a photograph) that depicts erotic behavior and is intended to cause sexual excitement*
3. *the depiction of acts in a sensational manner so as to arouse a quick intense emotional reaction*

The word "Pornography" is rooted in the Greek word porneia, which means to practice prostitution, sexual immorality, or fornication. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul frequently used the word in reference to any kind of sinful and illegitimate sexual activity.

Here are three very helpful definitions of "Pornography" written from a biblical perspective:

"Pornography is anything we use for sexual titillation, gratification or escape – whether it was intended for that purpose or not."

-Tim Chester, *Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free* (InterVarsity Press, 2010)

"Pornography is anything that the heart uses to find sexual expression outside of God's intended design for relational intimacy. It is anything that tempts or corrupts the human heart into desiring sexual pleasure in sinful ways."

-"Living in a 'Porn is the Norm' Culture" (HarvestUSA.org)

"Pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of

a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials."

-Catechism of the Catholic Church, section 2354

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Pornography: The Facts

If there's anything we know, it's that there is lots and lots of pornography on the Internet, it comes in many forms, it's accessible through any device with Internet access, and the volume is increasing daily. Thus, reliable statistics are difficult to find and outdated quickly. Here are some of the most recent facts:

- Men tend to access visual pornography, while women typically engage with literary pornography (erotica) and romance websites
- 80-90% of online pornography users only access free material

In 2017, Pornhub, the world's most popular porn website reported there were...

- 28.5 billion annual visits to the website
- 81 million daily average visits
- 25 billion searches performed
- Over 4 million videos uploaded
- 68 years of content uploaded

Teenagers and Pornography...

- 51% of male students and 32% of female students first viewed porn before their teenage years
- On average, first exposure to pornography among men was 12 years old
- Among regular porn users, 43% started viewing porn between the ages of 11 and 13
- Among teens age 13-17, 8% intentionally sought out pornography daily, 18% sought it out weekly, 57% sought out porn at least monthly



- 15% of 10-12 year olds were unwillingly exposed to nudity online
- Of teens and young adults, just 21% have someone helping them avoid pornography
- 90% of teens and 96% of young adults are either encouraging, accepting, or neutral when they talk about porn with their friends
- 83% of boys and 57% of girls have viewed group sex on the Internet
- 69% of boys and 55% of girls have seen pornography depicting same-sex intercourse online
- 39% of boys and 23% of girls have seen online sex acts depicting bondage online
- 32% of boys and 18% of girls have viewed bestiality on the Internet
- 18% of boys and 10% of girls have seen depictions of rape and/or sexual violence on the Internet
- 15% of boys and 9% of girls have seen child pornography
- Only 12% of parents knew their teens were accessing pornography



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Christian Men, Women, and Pornography...

According to a 2014 Barna study...

- 64% of self-identified Christian men and 15% of self-identified Christian women view pornography at least once a month
- 37% of Christian men and 7% of Christian women view pornography at least several times a week
- 39% of Christian men and 13% of Christian women say they believe their use of pornography is "excessive"
- 21% of Christian men and 2% of Christian women say they think they might be "addicted" to pornography or aren't sure if they are

What drives pornography addiction?

Experts say that pornography addiction is fueled by three factors that are unique to our current online/digital age:

- **Pornography is accessible.** There are thousands of sites that can be easily accessed when one is alone in their own home. In addition, mobile devices with Internet access offer 24/7 connection to pornography.

- **Pornography is anonymous.** A person can access pornography privately. Nobody has to know them, and they don't have to know the people behind the images.
- **Pornography is affordable.** The fact is that a large portion of Internet pornography can be accessed free of charge. Pornography that requires payment can be instantly accessed through the use of a credit card.

What are the effects of pornography on children and teens?

Research has associated the following outcomes with the use of pornography by children and teens:

- An exaggerated perception of sexual activity in society. . .the belief that "everyone's doing it" and "this must be normal"
- The abandonment of the hope of remaining sexually monogamous
- Belief that sexual promiscuity is natural and normal
- Belief that sexual abstinence and sexual inactivity are abnormal and unhealthy



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- Belief that marriage is sexually confining
- A lack of attraction to family and child-rearing
- Negative and/or traumatic emotional responses
- Earlier onset of first sexual intercourse
- The commodification of sex and the sexual objectification of persons
- Increased acceptance of sexual perversions (bestiality, group sex, bondage, etc.) as normal
- Belief that all women should act and be treated as porn stars, including screaming in ecstasy when touched by a man, and willingly receiving/enjoying aggressive and violent sexual perversions

What are the effects of pornography on adults?

Research has associated the following outcomes with the use of pornography by adults:

- Desensitization to depicted behaviors and normalization of what is seen
- Increased appetite for more graphic types of pornography and abusive, unsafe, or illegal sexual practices
- Decreased marital intimacy and sexual satisfaction
- Infidelity
- Increased marital distress, separation, and divorce

Pornography feeds the lie that the main purpose of sex is to have your own personal needs met.

- Devaluation of monogamy, marriage, and child-rearing
- Struggles with compulsive or addictive sexual behaviors
- Decreased ability to perform sexually

What are the signs of pornography addiction?

- A preoccupation and obsession with pornography
- An inability to stop looking at pornography in spite of previous attempts to do so
- Attempting to keep your obsession with pornography a secret
- Spending time with pornography, masturbating to it, and rationalizing/justifying your use of it
- Feelings of shame and guilt



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- It interferes with your marriage, home life, job, or schooling
- A need to increase intensity and frequency in order to get the desired outcomes

“RESEARCH REVEALS MANY SYSTEMIC EFFECTS OF INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY THAT ARE UNDERMINING AN ALREADY VULNERABLE CULTURE OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY. EVEN MORE DISTURBING IS THE FACT THAT THE FIRST INTERNET GENERATIONS HAVE NOT REACHED FULL-MATURITY, SO THE UPPER-LIMITS OF THIS IMPACT HAVE YET TO BE REALIZED.”

– JILL MANNING, SOCIOLOGIST

- Irritability when you are unable to access pornography
- Continuing the behavior in spite of the risk or realization of consequences, including relational breakdowns and job loss

Pornography's Lies

As an expression of brokenness, pornography takes God's good gift of sexuality and twists it all around. Pornography tells lies. And the deeper we go into pornography, the more we are convinced that the lies are not lies, but that they are truth. Here are some of the lies pornography tells:

- People are sexual objects to be used for our own pleasure
- Using pornography will make your life – and your sex life – better
- Sex is purely a recreational sport
- The main purpose of sex is to have your own personal needs met

- Pornography doesn't hurt anyone
- To dominate someone sexually is more fun and enjoyable than mutual sexual pleasure between a married husband and wife
- Pornography offers intimacy
- Pornography portrays sex as it was meant to be

Steps to Living Porn-Free...

Because pornography is a complex issue and trap, there are no easy avenues to being rescued and released from pornography's hold on your life. In his book *Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free* (InterVarsity Press, 2010), Tim Chester describes the five key ingredients that need to be in place to win the battle. While we recommend that you read and study *Closing the Window* for yourself, here's a list of Chester's five key ingredients:

1. *An abhorrence of porn. You must hate pornography and long for a change.*
2. *An adoration of God. You must desire God above all else and have confidence in the fact that He offers much more than pornography.*
3. *An assurance of grace. You must know that you are loved by God and with Him through faith in the work of Jesus Christ.*



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4. *An avoidance of temptation. You must be committed to do everything in your power to avoid temptation, beginning with the controls on your computer and other devices.*
5. *Accountability to others. Submit yourself to a community of Christians who will hold you accountable and support you in your struggle.*

When You Discover Your Child or Teen has Accessed Pornography...

Sadly, parenting in today's world means that having to follow-up on exposure to pornography is a when, not if, reality. Our friends at Harvest USA (a ministry to the sexually broken – harvestusa.org) make some great recommendations in their article, "My Kids Have Looked at Porn! What Do I Do Now?" While we strongly recommend you read the entire article (you can access it on their website), here's a rundown of the steps you should take:

1. *Control your anger. Remember to direct your anger at the sin and not to your child.*
2. *Go after their heart, not their behavior. You want to deal with the root of the issue, not the symptoms. A grace-filled approach that points them to Christ and an understanding of their fallenness and longings will help you direct your child to turn to Christ for his forgiveness and grace.*
3. *Keep a discussion going about sex. Their pornography use has opened the door for you to discuss God's wonderful gift of sexuality and the parameters He's established for healthy sexual expression.*
4. *Examine your own heart. Are you living God's design for your own sexuality?*
5. *Block the doors. Take steps to restrict access and choices, while engaging them in ongoing accountability.*

6. *Don't let up or give up. This is not a behavior that is fixed with controls. Shepherd them forward in their spiritual lives with the goal of heart change.*
7. *Evaluate whether or not outside counseling is necessary or beneficial. If in doubt, err on the side of caution and secure the services of a competent Christian counselor who has experience dealing with issues related to children, teens, and pornography.*

Recommended Resources

Books:

- Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free* by Tim Chester (InterVarsity Press, 2010)
- Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* by William S. Struthers (InterVarsity Press, 2009)
- When Your Husband is Addicted to Pornography: Healing Your Wounded Heart* by Vickie Tiede (New Growth Press, 2012)

Websites:

www.harvestusa.org (Harvest USA)

Accountability Software:

www.covenanteyes.com (Covenant Eyes)



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