

PORNOGRAPHY: MARRIAGE'S SILENT KILLER

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Introduction

In season four, episode four of the television show *The King of Queens*, delivery man Doug Heffernan rear-ended his best friend's car when trying to peek into a strip club. When his wife Carrie found out the reason for the accident, little concern was shown for his wandering eye. Instead, she focused her attention on finding someone else to pay for the accident damage.¹ This is a striking analogy of what takes place every day in America, as husbands wreck their marriages through the allure of pornography. The growing social tolerance toward the presence of pornographic activity as a normal part of life is contributing to the deterioration of the marriage bond. Although widely available and borderline socially acceptable, Internet pornography, when introduced into a marriage, is severely destructive to both a husband and wife.

How It Gets In

Societal norms do not restrict the introduction of pornography into the lives of families, including children. From television shows focusing on infidelity to billboards selling cars with bikini-clad women, "soft-porn" is easily viewable by those who are the most susceptible to its long-term effects. It only follows that a majority of sex addicts were exposed to pornography at an early age.² Children presented with these images are

¹ "The King of Queens: Episode List," Internet, available from http://www.thekingofqueens.com/past_shows.php?pg=2&SearchBy=Season&SearchKoQ=400, accessed 20 April 2014.

² Dr. Stephen B. Skinner, *Treating Pornography Addiction* (Provo:GrowthClimate 2005): 16.

both confused emotionally and excited physically and are not yet ready to process the information they are receiving. Thus, exposing children to sexual situations causes them to be predisposed to sexual addiction later on in life, and particularly vulnerable to Internet pornography.³ Sadly, nine out of ten boys and six out of ten girls have been exposed to graphic pornographic images before the age of eighteen.⁴ This distorts the way children view healthy relationships with the opposite sex. Exposure of this kind also mars their perception of sex, as viewing pornography is often done in secret, establishing a practice that results in perpetual guilt.⁵ By the time they reach adulthood, a staggering seventy percent of men view Internet pornography once a month.⁶ Once connected to the world-wide-web, a \$13 billion industry offers a myriad of choices to satisfy the pornographic addiction. Not surprisingly, the third most searched for term on the Internet is “sex” behind “and” and “the.”⁷ The Internet is considered to be an endless expanse of anonymity, and for those involved in an unhappy marriage, it can become a gateway to infidelity, as they are nearly forty percent more likely to view online pornography.⁸ Most pornography is viewed online on weekdays between the hours of 9:00am to 5:00pm,

³ Skinner, 17.

⁴ “Porn and Your Teens,” Internet, available from <http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>, accessed 20 April 2014.

⁵ Skinner, 16.

⁶ Timothy C. Morgan, “Porn’s Stranglehold,” *Christianity Today* (March 2008), 7.

⁷ J. Brian Bransfield, *Overcoming Pornography Addiction: A Spiritual Addiction* (Mahwah:Paulist Press 2013), 10.

⁸ “Porn and Your Teens.”

which means it is being consumed during the normal workday – away from the presence of a significant other.⁹ In this way it may be downloaded for private viewing at a later time, or in the case of pornographic relationships, a rendezvous arranged for infidelity. Pornography is introduced to children at an early age and then is more easily manifested in the marriages of adults.

Effects on Marriage

Once pornography is introduced into a marriage its effects are often deadly. A 2002 report by a consortium of attorneys reported that 68% of their divorce cases involved one party meeting a new lover through the Internet, and 56% involved one party obsessed with Internet pornography.¹⁰ But the death of a marriage is not instantaneous. It begins with the individual engaged in the use of pornography becoming less satisfied and happy with their marriage.¹¹ Often a spouse seeks online pornography because of loneliness, out of boredom, or even anger. The availability of the easy stimulation is used to release stress and the spouse becomes addicted to the process of obtaining pornography.¹² As with an addictive drug, pornography forms new neural networks in

⁹ Bransfield, 10.

¹⁰ Jonathan Dedmon, “Is the Internet bad for your marriage? Online affairs, pornographic sites playing greater role in divorces.” Press Release from The Dilenschneider Group, Inc., Nov. 14, 2002. <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/is-the-internet-bad-for-your-marriage-online-affairs-pornographic-sites-playing-greater-role-in-divorces-76826727.html> (accessed Dec. 27, 2012).

¹¹ Richard Patterson and Joseph Price, “Pornography, Religion, and the Happiness Gap: Does Pornography Impact the Actively Religious Differently?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 1 (2012), 80.

¹² Amy Frykholm, “Pastors and Pornography: Addictive Behavior,” *Christian Century* (September 2007), 20.

the brain, physically altering how it processes a person's view of the opposite sex.¹³ For those who have entered the commitment of marriage, experimenting with pornography is never without repercussions, as it has been called the "cocaine of sexual addiction."¹⁴

The writer of Proverbs spoke candidly of this principle.

"26 For a prostitute will bring you to poverty, but sleeping with another man's wife will cost you your life. 27 Can a man scoop a flame into his lap and not have his clothes catch on fire?" – Proverbs 6:26-27, *NLT*

The consumer of pornography becomes increasingly tolerant to the images being viewed and requires more extensive time searching the Internet to appease their addiction.¹⁵ They may also seek to have their partner recreate aberrant activity viewed online, which beforehand was uncharacteristic in their relationship.¹⁶

When the secret of the pornographic activity is revealed the full weight of this destructive practice begins to be made manifest.

The first casualty of this behavior, and the longest to repair is trust.¹⁷

Often the pornography user feels shame and has therefore been hiding the behavior from their spouse; therefore, the offended party feels betrayed and

¹³ "An Equal Opportunity Destroyer," *Christianity Today* (September 2010), 71.

¹⁴ Mark L. Lasser, "Transforming the Brain: There's a Reason Why Pornography is So Addicting," *Christianity Today* (March 2010), 61.

¹⁵ Jennifer P. Schneider, "Effects of Cybersex Addiction on the Family: Results of a Survey," *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 7 (2000), 37.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁷ Spencer T. Zitzman and Mark H. Butler, "Attachment, Addiction, and Recovery: Conjoint Marital Therapy for Recovery from Sexual Addiction," *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* (2005), 314.

unable to trust their spouse in even basic matters.¹⁸ Since men are 584% more likely to view online pornography than women, the hurt party is often the wife.¹⁹ Even though their husband may have had no physical contact with another woman, the act is still considered adultery because the wife has been deceived and has not been receiving the emotional attention needed.²⁰ In these situations, wives often become depressed, feeling as if they are to blame for their husband's pornographic activity. They may try to compete with the unrealistic images that their husband views online and, unable to do so, drift further into lower levels of self-esteem.²¹ They feel ashamed of their peers' reaction to discovering the reality of their situation and how it might affect their children. A relationship meant to thrive on trust and communication has now digressed to a husband negotiating to keep access to his sin and a wife issuing ultimatums in regards to its cessation. A normally calm, self-assured woman is changed into a possessive, overly inquisitive private detective. Between the mental fatigues required to keep track of her husband and the disappointment of broken promises, the wife's life becomes untenable.²² The husband begins to resent the control exerted over him by his wife in this area, additional conflict arises between the two, and this results

¹⁸ Ibid., 315.

¹⁹ "Porn and Your Teens."

²⁰ Schneider, 44.

²¹ Ibid., 39.

²² Ibid., 52.

in further alienation among the couple. As the effects of pornography continue to weaken the marriage, most couples report sexual problems, with the husband becoming emotionally detached during sex. The couple is unable to engage in relationship intercourse as the husband objectifies the wife and does not see her as God's gift to him.²³

“18 Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” 22 Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.” – Genesis 2:18,22;
NLT

Clearly, Internet pornography, casually called “nudies” and passed around by men unashamedly is destructive, and this detachment is the separation that sin creates when it enters into a life. Christians in particular report that viewing pornography creates a lower level of closeness to God. Indeed, the longer a person engages in online pornographic activity, the lower their inhibitions become regarding acting in ways previously inconceivable to them.²⁴ For marriages affected by pornography left untreated, eighteen percent resulted in the offender becoming involved in live relationships offline.²⁵ With all of these mitigating factors bearing down on the marriage, as previously stated, many marriages ultimately end in divorce.

“15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” – James 1:15, *NASB*

²³ Ibid., 42.

²⁴ Alina Baltazar and others, “Internet Pornography Use in the Context of External and Internal Religiosity,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38, no.1 (2010), 33.

²⁵ Schneider, 38.

Effect on Children

But the effect of pornography on marriage does not stop there. Many times children, if present in the home, have felt the pain inflicted by pornography long before a marriage ends. Many children have been neglected by the parent involved in pornography because of the excessive amount of time they were spending online in search of it. Others witnessed the conflicts that inevitably arose between their parents as they argued about the presence of pornography in their relationship. The offender's pornographic activity created a tense atmosphere in the home that could not be hidden from the children. In addition to this, some children walked in on a parent engaged in the pornographic activity or were exposed to it accidentally by their own parent.²⁶

Effects on Treatment

Because pornography is more socially acceptable among the secular demographic, the stigma attached to it in religious circles often prevents couples from getting help where they need it the most.²⁷ Because people of faith view pornography as wrong, its presence within a Christian marriage engenders guilt and a need for cleansing. However, too often they feel that exposing this particular sin to their church in an effort to gain help would result in their being ostracized from the membership or be viewed as "perverts."²⁸ Although alcoholism is freely confessed and granted pardon within the

²⁶ Ibid., 32.

²⁷ Mark White and Thomas Kimball, "Attributes of Christian Couples with a Sexual Addiction to Internet Pornography," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 28, no.4 (2009), 350.

²⁸ Ibid., 353.

walls of the church, and programs created to aid in the confessor's recovery, pornography is still viewed as particularly immoral and somehow a greater sin.²⁹ Few support groups exist to help one recover from the effects of pornography and the mindset is still prevalent in the church that permanently marks a person repenting of pornography as a "dirty sinner." Many times pastors are not trained to deal with pornography as an issue, and refuse to confront it in a biblically sound manner.³⁰ As a matter of fact, the issue may be hitting clergy too close to home. A controlled study of the extra-marital sexual behavior of ministers showed that nearly half of all pastors consume pornography. Further, this activity had a significant impact on the presence of extra-marital affairs in their marriages.³¹ Therefore, a couple affected by pornography is experiencing emotional and spiritual pain like never before and feel isolated from the very institution designed to minister to it. Christians have access to the only true balm that will heal addiction to pornography and a broken marriage; but the isolation caused by the church often pushes them away from this cherished resource.³²

Change Begins at Home

If the church is to be like Christ in the ministry to people, she must be willing to love "the least of these." One of the greatest applications of Jesus' interaction with the

²⁹ Ibid., 356.

³⁰ John W. Kennedy, "Help for the Sexually Desperate," *Christianity Today* (March 2008), 34.

³¹ John W. Thoburn and Jack O. Balswick, "Demographic Data on Extra-Marital Sexual Behavior in the Ministry," *Pastoral Psychology* 46, no. 6 (1998), 453.

³² White and Kimball, 357.

woman caught in adultery in John 8 is not the acceptance of continued sin or the permission of immorality. It is the fact that Jesus loves people and desires to minister to all who come in repentance to Him.

“9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” – 2 Peter 3:9, *NASB*

Most churches do not communicate about moral sexuality effectively. Instead, its focus has been on the immoral side of issue, leaving its congregants without a refuge when affected by pornography. Sexual sin should not be viewed as acceptable behavior within the church; however, confession of it should be treated with the same compassion and goal in mind: restoration upon repentance. The church should no longer isolate people suffering from the effects of pornography or sexual addiction. It should reassure them that they are not hurting alone, nor are they the only ones struggling with pornography. They should not be shunned in the church when actively pursuing restoration with an attitude of repentance and receive counseling, encouragement, and spiritual exhortation.³³ Further, God’s plan for healthy sexual relationships within the confines of marriage should be taught in the church, as it is a potent safeguard against sexual immorality. Happily married men are over sixty percent less likely to view pornography.³⁴ It is only when the church changes its attitude towards those affected by pornography that the afflicted will feel comfortable receiving the help they truly need.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Steven Stack, Ira Wasserman, and Roger Kern, “Adult social bonds and use of Internet pornography.” *Social Science Quarterly* 85 (March 2004): 75-88.

Conclusion

The business of pornography is thriving, generating more revenue annually than professional football, baseball, and basketball combined.³⁵ But this vice is as addictive as it is destructive. Pornography is often more devastating to an individual than a recreational drug because the one affected carries the chemical needed to satisfy the addiction within his or her own body. With the freely available material on the Internet, a person does not have to procure a dealer, and the addiction may be supported with a minimal financial cost. Further, the advent of smart phones has exacerbated the availability of pornography, providing it to those who otherwise may not have been susceptible to it. Social acceptance of the consumption of pornography adds to the perception that it is not harmful and even appropriate at times. But the evidence paints a much clearer picture of its impact on the physical structure of a person. Beginning with childhood and lasting through the adult years, pornography affects the way people view one another relationally and physically rewires the brain to seek elevated, more uninhibited levels of gratification. When pornography enters a marriage, it destroys the foundation for a lifetime commitment: trust. From there it establishes distance, engenders bitterness, and in many cases causes the marriage to die. For this reason, pornography must not be looked upon as harmless entertainment or a viable way to address any emotional or physical need. It is harmful in every exposure to the mind and spirit. Moreover, the church needs to speak openly about the issue of pornography and encourage the body of Christ to be less judgmental in this area. This does not mean that

³⁵ Bransfield, 10.

it should condone or allow its continued behavior, only that it promote the ability of those affected to receive help without fear of retaliation from the membership. When the church becomes more open about this issue, it will find the voice to comfort and restore those who are in desperate need of God's forgiveness.

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