



From Porn Nation to Pure Freedom



Michael Leahy

Fast Facts about the Big Business of Pornography

Pornography generates \$57 billion annual revenue world-wide—\$12–14 billion in the US.

US porn revenue is larger than the combined revenues of all professional football, baseball and basketball franchises.

Child pornography generates \$3 billion annual revenue world-wide.

The largest consumer group of Internet pornography are 12–17 year-olds.

There's been a 1,200% increase in the number of pornographic web sites in the past 5 years.

Last year, there were over 11,000 new adult film titles released vs. less than 500 from Hollywood studios.

The average length of career for a porn actress is 1 year.

87% of 15–17 year-olds have had multiple exposure to hard-core pornography.

A woman between the ages 18–34 has a 7% chance of being as slim as a catwalk model and a 1% chance of being as thin as a supermodel.

In a sample of Stanford undergraduate and graduate students, 68% felt worse about their own appearance after looking through women's magazines.

75% of "normal" weight women think they are overweight and 90% of women overestimate their body size.

The average woman sees 400–600 advertisements per day, and by the time she is 17 years-old, she has received over 250,000 commercial messages through the media. Most targeted at women and girls emphasize the importance of beauty.

80% of 10 year-old girls have dieted, and at any one time, 50% of American women are dieting.

In a controlled test conducted with college-aged males exposed to hard-core pornography on a daily basis over a 2 week period, over half of the men admitted that they would rape a woman if they knew they would get away with it.

1 in 4 women on college campus are sexually assaulted or raped, double the rate in the general population.

PORN NATION... Is that what we're becoming—a nation obsessed with sex? Or have we already arrived? Has porn become so commonplace that it's now the norm? The statistics seem convincing. According to the Los Angeles Times, the revenues for cable operators alone from pornographic programming have quadrupled since the late 1990's. Tim Connelly, editor and publisher of Adult Video News says, "Its scary how much money is spent on porn...it's more than Hollywood makes at the box office and it just grows and grows. It's mainstream now." (February 2, 2005)

The effects of porn, however, go much deeper than the eye-popping statistics of what would classically be considered pornographic material. The insidious nature of our hypersexualized culture can be felt even more when you consider that the dictionary defines pornography as "any material designed to cause sexual arousal or excitement." That includes movies, music, magazines, TV, literature, advertising, and even today's chic clothing.

What this means is that whether we're using or pursuing "pornographic" material or not, we are still subject to its effects on a daily basis when others are using it on us. When I was a college student back in the late 1970's, we had to aggressively pursue porn to find it. There was still the perception of men in trench coats going to the seedier parts of towns to find xxx movies. Now, we are faced with images that would have been considered pornographic two decades ago in the checkout line at the local convenience store, in video game characters, even as standard fare during TV's infamous "family hour." Yes, it appears that porn is now the norm.

But that begs the question: So what? What does it really matter? Is it really that harmful? Isn't it something that can be done in private, that doesn't really have to affect other people? Isn't it a harmless pastime, a pleasurable diversion from the monotony of everyday life? Really now, so what?



PERSONAL ISOLATION AND DESTRUCTION | (My Story)

As a college student, I didn't really give much thought to my consumption of porn and my sexually "free" lifestyle. I was having a good time and my sexual appetite didn't seem to be hindering me in the pursuit of my dreams. Actually, my path to heartache and destruction began years before I even set foot on a college campus.

I can still remember the first pornographic image I saw when I was 11 years old. That image, plus thousands of other pornographic images that I added over the next 30 years of my life years, remains imprinted in my mind like a bad dream that refuses to go away. As an adolescent, I decided to hide these new discoveries from others. My private world became a secret world with a new best friend—pornography. But with this "relationship" also came a heavy burden of guilt and shame related to my viewing women as sex objects with little regard for their personhood.

By the time I hit high school, I had graduated from simply viewing porn to seeking out the real thing in relationships. Magazines had already started to bore me. I wanted more. I lost my virginity sometime around my sophomore year. Suddenly, getting girls to have sex with me became an exciting and important social pursuit that I openly shared with my peers.

College life was a whole new ballgame. No more sneaking around and hiding from my inquisitive parents. Finally, I was free and in control of my own life. All my friends and I consumed soft-core porn as if it was the daily newspaper. Our girlfriends never really said much about it. It was just a part of our world. After all, we weren't hurting anyone, right?

Over time, the more porn I consumed, the greater my appetite for sex became. Still, I didn't see any harm in it. I was on the football team and even student body president my senior year. By the time I graduated from college in 1980, I had well-established behaviors of viewing porn and treating women the way men in porn treated the women they sought to conquer—like objects designed for a man's sexual pleasure alone.

After graduation, life in the "real world" was looking pretty. I got a high-level job as a computer industry sales executive and married the woman of my dreams. On my wedding night, I was struck by the thought that my bride wouldn't be enough for me sexually. That should have told me that I had a problem with sexual compulsivity. Here I was

married to this wonderful, very beautiful woman, but I wasn't satisfied. I wanted more of what my secret friend, pornography seemed to deliver—the same variety, the same high. It was obvious that I still needed to have pornography in my life, to meet those needs that she wouldn't be able to meet, or so I thought.

The biggest leap in my sexually destructive behavior came with the quiet introduction of a new technology within my industry that, over time, took up more and more of my "free time"—the Internet. Eventually, that wasn't enough. So I started viewing it at work. A lot. Even while traveling, remote access to the material via dial-up connection to the Internet from my hotel room became a staple for me.

Being in the computer industry, it didn't take me long to discover that the Internet was loaded with an unlimited supply and variety of pornographic images. I could remain anonymous while viewing it, it didn't cost me anything, and I always had access to it as long as a phone line was nearby. It was a sex addict's dream, thousands of images to be viewed, totally in the privacy in the office, home or hotel room. It was also the beginning of the end for my marriage and my family.

Over time, even constant access to this buffet table of sexual imagery wasn't enough. One day, the woman of my pornographic dreams, my fantasy in the flesh walked into my office. She embodied everything I saw and lusted after in porn—the pixels and cellulose of my porn with skin on. So I had an affair. Over the course of the next 18 months, even after confessing this relationship to my wife who was fighting to save our family, my marriage of 15 years finally ended in divorce because I was still unwilling to end an affair with this woman. The ultimate irony occurred a year after my divorce. I discovered that this new woman, whom I thought I loved, was also having affairs with five other married men at the same time! Yes, I got exactly what I was looking for—the look, the values, the false intimacy. Not unlike what I had been consuming all those years.

Soon after the breakup of that relationship, the realization of what I had done started to sink in. I hit bottom. I was alone, empty, in despair. In my heartache, I even heard a voice one night inside my head. It said, "You can end all this pain right now. You can get a gun, stick it in your mouth, pull the trigger, and all this pain will go away instantly." Somehow, (I know now) not of my own strength, I was able to choose life and begin to turn the corner toward recovery and healing.

PURE FREEDOM

I want you to understand one important thing about my story—it represents just one of millions of accounts of the realities of porn consumption becoming a compulsive and addictive cycle leading to out-of-control behavior. We call this increasingly compulsive behavior “sex syndrome,” and if the root issues driving this behavior are left unaddressed, it can lead to full-blown sexual addiction. I urge you to not think about porn and sexually destructive behavior as just a moral issue. It’s one part behavioral and one part spiritual, most often emerging from a common desire and need we all have to be loved and accepted by others.

The only problem is porn delivers just the opposite. My addiction to porn led me to isolation, loneliness, and self-image issues, especially in the context of relationships. Think about it—what’s more important to us than having deeply intimate and satisfying relationships? Porn is a problem because it inhibits the formation of authentic, real and honest relationships. Real people aren’t like the ever-ready mirage of pornography. Porn conditions us to expect someone else to perform on demand. Everything about it leads to unrealistic expectations—expectations that can never be met; desires that can never be satisfied.

In the same way, the healing and restoration necessary to move from false intimacy to true intimacy also involves a relational solution. It’s a relational solution that also has at least two components—a behavioral solution and a spiritual solution. One without the other is like trying to eat a half-baked cake—it is wholly unsatisfying.

Steps to Freedom: Changing Behavior

My healing and restoration in relationships involved some practical changes I needed to make. They included my identifying and avoiding the “triggers”—the people, places and things that started me down the slippery slope of compulsive sexual behavior, the fuel for my addiction. I needed to be brutally honest with myself and with others about what I had done and even what I was tempted to do. I had to make amends wherever possible and practical to those I had hurt in the past. Today, by God’s grace, my relationships with my ex-wife, who is remarried, her husband, our two boys, and many other family members and friends has been or is in the process of being restored. I had to move towards real relationships with others where I was willing to hear the truth and accept the forgiveness and love that, much to my surprise, many were willing to offer if I only let them. I invested time spent in community with others who struggled in similar ways and made myself accountable to them for what I did and what I thought. And, I needed to understand how to manage my emotions and come up with some new strategies for living on a daily basis. Please don’t get me wrong, I am still very much a work in progress. Though at times the process has been grueling, I have seen that it’s worth the effort in the end. There is definitely a new sense of freedom in my life.

However, as I mentioned above, the behavioral changes I made were only part of the total solution. There were other changes that needed to take place in my life in order to experience pure freedom. I needed to apply a spiritual solution as well in order to be truly free and to live the life I’ve been created to live.

freedom...



Steps to Freedom: The Spiritual Dynamic

- 1 I needed to realize that God does in fact love me, in spite of the incredible mess I made of my life.

“For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

—JOHN 3:16

- 2 No matter how hard I tried there was nothing I could do to earn or merit a relationship with God. My mess, often called sin, caused me to fall short of God’s perfect standard.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... The wages of sin is death.” —ROMANS 3:23; 6:23

- 3 This is the most amazing part. God doesn’t say, “Clean up your mess and I will accept you and love you.” No, he demonstrated his love for us in personally cleaning up the problem of sin by dying for it—on a cross. And, he proved He could beat death by rising from the dead (commonly called the resurrection).

“But God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

—ROMANS 5:8

“I passed on to you what was of first importance; that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day...”

—I CORINTHIANS 15:3-4

- 4 The application point: I can’t earn or merit God’s favor by my own performance but instead I simply need to place my trust in Jesus Christ to forgive me for my mess—my sin.

“But to as many as received him to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name.” —JOHN 1:12

All experts in the area of sexual addiction agree that addressing the spiritual area of a person’s life is an incredibly important part of recovery and living a healthy, balanced life. We’ve been created to live in relationship. We’ve been created to have honest, authentic connections with others. My relationship with pornography was a counterfeit- it was anti-real. Even my affair with the apparent woman of my dreams wasn’t based on what was real- it was based on a fantasy that ended up leading to only heartache and pain for a lot of people, especially for my boys and the real woman of my dreams, my wife Patty.

As I’ve gotten healthier in my relationships, I’ve realized the foundation for such progress is based on acceptance, love, and the willingness to forgive. I’ve discovered that true intimacy with others begins with an intimate relationship with God, my Creator. Let me explain briefly what I mean using four basic points:

[Please Read the Points to the Left]

These four points are not that complicated are they? Profound, yet simple. I’d be remiss to not invite you to make the decision I made several years ago to invite Jesus to enter my life, forgive my sins, and set me on a course to experience what He’s created me to experience—real intimacy in relationship both with God and with others.

The following is a suggested prayer. Prayer is simply talking with God. The words aren’t important; the attitude of your heart is. However, I’ve included a suggested prayer below you may find helpful to express your heart attitude toward God.

“Lord Jesus I need you. Thank you for demonstrating your love by dying on the cross to pay for my mess- my sin. I now place my trust in you to pay for my sin and its penalty, death. I ask You to one-day-at-a time make me into the person you created me to be. Amen.”

Yes, freedom, contentment and fulfillment are available to you for the asking. And, if you are willing to do some work in moving toward relationship—with God and others—you can experience a new life—a life that the allures of pornography could never deliver, a life for which you were created. Might you choose that life now?

Resources for Help and Healing with Sexually Compulsive and Destructive Behavior

I’ve included a list of resources below that may help you further. Some may be helpful if you need more information for a paper or research project. All are helpful if you are struggling with porn and a sexually compulsive lifestyle that you have come to realize is hurting your life and your relationships.

Books

“Out of the Shadows” by Dr. Patrick Carnes. *The* groundbreaking book on the subject of sexual addiction.

“Faithful and True” by Mark Laaser. From a former sex addict and pastor with small group resources for Christ-centered recovery.

“Breaking Free” by Russell Willingham.

“False Intimacy” by Harry Schaumberg.

Recovery Groups:

Secular 12-Step Recovery Groups:

“Sexaholics Anonymous” (SA): www.sa.org

“Sex Addicts Anonymous” (SAA): www.sexaa.org

“Sex and Love Addicts” (SLAA): www.slaafws.org

Internet Tools for Content Blocking, Filtering and Accountability:

Bsafe Online: www.bsafefhome.com (Internet blocking, filtering and accountability software).

Integrity Online: www.integrity.com (Filtered internet service).

Covenant Eyes: www.covenanteyes.com (Internet accountability).

Other Helpful Resources:

www.pureintimacy.org (Helpful website for those seeking freedom from sexually destructive behavior).

Bethesda Workshops: www.bethesdaworkshops.org (For sexually addicted men and women and their spouses).



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