

## ***Internet Pornography: The Perfect Addiction***

West County Psychological Associates

Tony Tramelli, MA, PLPC

(314) 275-8599    [www.wcpastl.com](http://www.wcpastl.com)

Internet pornography is one of the most pressing issues of our time. It is an issue that can affect everyone in our culture, but especially children and adolescents. It affects brain development, sexual desires, relationships, and marriages. It is highly addictive, and is the cause of widespread sexual dysfunction, depression, anxiety, insomnia, and marital problems. Pornography is not a new issue in our society, but it has never been more problematic and pervasive than it is right now. It is a phenomenon that has grown largely in the last decade, but has gone relatively unnoticed. This can no longer be the case. This issue has to be addressed, and it must begin within our families. Parents have to be aware of the very real dangers of internet pornography and they have to know what to do if they are concerned about their loved ones.

### **Facts about Internet Pornography Addiction:**

- Internet porn sites get more traffic every month than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined. In 2015 Pornhub, an adult video-sharing site, had about 87.8 billion views of its videos. About 40 million U.S. adults admit to viewing internet pornography daily.
- Most adult content is viewed with a mobile device rather than on a desktop or laptop computer. Adult content is a three billion dollar a year business in this country even though most of the content is free.
- Most boys begin seeking internet pornography by age ten. This is right at the beginning of their sexual curiosity and development. Internet pornography at this age is devastating on the brain, as the brain develops in a way that connects sex and love with the extreme, lewd content that is viewed.
- Our young people have more access to sexual content in a span of ten minutes than our ancestors had in a lifetime. Our brains have not evolved for this type of sexual exposure, which contributes to internet pornography's addictive nature.
- Internet pornography is far more compelling than traditional pornography. The male sex drive is novelty seeking – new mates are more biologically appealing than familiar ones. Internet pornography aligns perfectly with novelty seeking sexual behavior. It is easily accessible, it is free, and it is endless. Dopamine surges to the brain with every view, and over time more and more content is needed to satisfy the urge. And it is not just the quantity that increases; it is also the type of pornography. Most people struggling with internet pornography addiction note that their tastes have become more extreme and dangerous over time.
- After many viewings, internet pornography becomes normalized. Our boys come to believe that what they see is what normal sexuality looks like and what should be expected. Our girls come to believe that it is what is expected of them. This is quite harmful to dating relationships. Young boys and girls may feel pressure to have the type of relationships that they see in this lascivious content. A 2012 study published in Psychological Science found that the more teens were exposed to sexual content, the earlier they started having sex and the likelier they were to have casual, unprotected sex.

- Internet pornography addiction can develop even more easily than a drug or alcohol addiction because it engages the most sensitive sense we have, our eyes. The images are directly stored in the memory and imagination which remain long after viewing Internet pornography, altering the structure and function of the brain.
- Twenty percent of college students feel that they are controlled by their porn use, and 12% spend five hours or more per week on porn sites. Individuals who are feeling addicted to pornography have created an online support group that has become very popular; there are about four thousand new subscribers every month. Thirty-one percent of this community is aged 13-19 and about sixty percent is aged 20-29. These are populations who have had access to internet pornography at the beginning of their sexual development or early into it. Internet pornography is the cause of widespread sexual dysfunction through these cohorts of young men. It is also the cause of marital problems, depression, social anxiety, insomnia, and paraphilias.
- After abstaining from internet pornography, those in recovery report that they are more social, less anxious, more likely to engage in real-life romantic relationships, more understanding of their strengths and weakness, and possessing increased energy levels and productivity.

What can parents do? Parents need to have a relationship with their children that allows for honest and open communication. Studies show that kids are influenced by their parents and what they teach them about sex. We need to talk to children about the dangers of internet pornography, and give them the tools they need to withstand the pressure they may feel to use it.

- Be aware. Check the websites, apps, and video games your children are using. Much adult content is accessed by seemingly innocent websites and videos.
- Have limits in the house about how much screen time is allowed. Lead by example by limiting your own screen time. A good place to start is not allowing devices at the dinner table. Also, do not allow children to keep their phones and devices in their rooms at bedtime.
- Talk with your children about personal boundaries with friends when encountering difficult situations, for example sharing sexual images via Snapchat or texting.
- Explain the consequences of internet pornography. It is not enough to tell them they shouldn't do it because it is wrong. They need to understand the very serious psychological and emotional implications that internet pornography has.

If you are concerned that your child or loved one is struggling with internet pornography issues it is advisable to seek the help of a trained mental health professional. Internet pornography addiction can be treated. It takes hard work, but with the right help it can be overcome.

### **Suggested Resources:**

- *Your Brain on Porn; Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction.* Gary Wilson.
- *Girls and Sex; Navigating the Complicated New Landscape.* Peggy Orenstein.
- [www.yourbrainonporn.com](http://www.yourbrainonporn.com)
- [www.fightthenewdrug.org](http://www.fightthenewdrug.org)