



Redeemed in Love

A PASTORAL RESOURCE FOR THE HEALING AND PREVENTION OF
PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION

INTRODUCTION

“Mercy,” Pope Francis reminds us is, “the beating heart of the Gospel.” (MV, 12) Mercy is the fundamental human experience that lifts us out of our own failings and allows us to recognize the dignity bestowed on us in Christ. It is for this reason that we have published *Redeemed in Love* as a pastoral resource to assist those affected by the ills of pornography as well as those involved in lay and ordained ministry who encounter and serve people afflicted by pornography. In addition, there are specific resources included to assist parents in nurturing a healthy sense of sexuality in their children.

Sacred Scripture is saturated with nuptial language that unveils the mystery that God the Father is a Lover who constantly pursues us in relationship and intimacy. The Church has a deep regard for human love. She believes that sexuality is one of the most privileged expressions of human love between husband and wife. In recognizing the beauty and goodness of human sexuality the Church upholds the truth of sexuality, which rises above the vicissitude of our culture, to uphold the personal and human dimensions essential to genuine love.

Authentic human sexuality is rooted in the total gift of one’s self to another. Any sexual encounter where the full humanity of the person is not recognized and appreciated as a gift is a cheap counterfeit that ultimately depreciates human dignity. These counterfeit expressions of love remove the personal dimension of sex and turn the other person into an object of desire and pleasure for consumption. (CCC, 2354) Pornography is one of the greatest counterfeits of love in our time. Because of its current accessibility, it is increasingly effecting family life and distorting how an entire generation understands sexuality.

Within this booklet is an **outline of healthy sexuality**, the **social data on pornography**, and a number of **pastoral resources for information and recovery**. This resource is meant to be a high-level synopsis of the large body of information available on the ills of pornography. It is not meant to be exhaustive or comprehensive, but rather the goal is to provide a digestible resource for lay leaders, clergy, and parents so that they may proclaim mercy and healing to those struggling with the harmful effects of pornography and sexual addiction by affirming their dignity and journeying with them to walk in freedom as a child of God.

SOURCES FOR STATISTICS ON PAGE 3:

Dines, Gail (2015). “Today’s Pornography and the Crisis of Violence Against Women and Children”. *Pornography: A Public Health Crisis: How pornography fuels sex trafficking, child exploitation, and sexual violence*, 6.

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THE CULTURE OF PORN

Pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties.

CCC 2354

42%

Estimated portion of Internet with porn sites

80%

Women in sex industry under pimp control

56%

Divorces that involve one party having an obsessive relationship to porn

BY AGE
18

6 of 10 girls viewed porn
9 of 10 boys viewed porn

\$13 BILLION
ANNUAL REVENUE FOR PORN
INDUSTRY IN UNITED STATES

by comparison, this equals the
2015 revenue of the National
Football League (NFL)

8-11 YEARS OLD

average age at which a person is
exposed to pornography, either
accidentally or intentionally

TEEN PORN

a person who "appears to be" a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct

|||| most dominant genre of porn on internet ||||

|||| comprises 33% of total porn sites on internet ||||

|||| roughly 33% of total internet porn searches ||||

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

The foothold of pornography in modern culture is rooted largely in the reality of immediate access coupled with the science of how pornographic content stimulates the brain. This pairing creates the condition of possibility for pornography abuse and addiction to flourish.

While sexual deviance has been around since the Fall of man, pornography as we know it was not able to capture sustained attention until the technological advances of the 20th century. Thinking back to the 1950's, if a person wanted to find sexually explicit material, they had to go to a physical location on the outskirts of town and purchase material or sexual favors from another individual. Through the 1960s and 1970s, the sexual revolution brought about many non-traditional views on human sexuality and the family (such as the widespread acceptance of contraception, premarital or extramarital sex, etc), all which helped to normalize sexual exploration. Pornography, during this period in our history, became one of the primary places for self-exploration and sexual curiosity to flourish. As new forms of media developed in the late 1970s through the 1980s, such as the VCR, Polaroid camera line, and the Internet, the accessibility to pornography increased more and more. Since the mid-1990s, the Internet has had an incalculable effect on culture and made access to adult content immediate.

Recent studies indicate that pornography affects the brain in a similar way to how drugs or alcohol effect the brain. The substance—whether it is alcohol, tobacco, drugs, or even pornography—overwhelm the brain with dopamine, which is the “feel-good” chemical in the brain, creating the experience of a sort of ecstasy or high. The problem with this natural process is that, joined with the social and technological advances of the past several decades, a person has instant access to a nearly unlimited number of mood-altering sexual stimulants. As this behavior is repeated, the brain becomes naturally desensitized and requires more dopamine to achieve that feel-good state. The higher the release of dopamine in the brain, the greater the risk is that the person will become addicted to pornography.

Authentic Human Sexuality

WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S TEACHING ON SEXUALITY?

If you trace back the Church's teachings on human sexuality from all the practical moral precepts around contraception, premarital sex, pornography, cohabitation, and all the rest, what you will find is that at the core of these precepts lays the foundational belief that the human person is definitively a creature made by love and for love. The moral teachings of the Church acts as a fence that protects the human person from counterfeit versions of love that may attack or distort this original identity of the human person.

The Book of Genesis reveals that the human person is made in the image and likeness of God. "By the virtue of (a person's) soul and his spiritual powers of intellect and will, man is endowed with freedom," the Catechism continues to describe this freedom as, "an outstanding manifestation of the divine image." (CCC 1705) Our intellect, will, and capacity for freedom reflect God's own divine nature, which is written into all of us from the beginning of time. These essential components of the human person are foundational to our call to give ourselves in love.

Scripture also tells us in 1 John 4: 19, "God is love." God's existence is love, a complete outpouring and gift of God's own self, first in Creation and finally in the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. To love, to selflessly give oneself completely to another, is to be like God. This call to love, to self-sacrificing generosity, is, "the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being." (CCC 2392) We fulfill this call to love specifically in our volition, or capacity to choose. Our freedom creates the possibility to do something divine, to selflessly give ourselves away in love.

"Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him."

Saint John Paul II, Redemptor Hominis

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH OUR SEXUALITY?

Sexual intimacy is a unique expression of our capacity for love and pleasure within marriage. Authentic human sexuality is rooted in the gift of one's self to another person—not just in terms of the giving of one's body but one's entire self. Sex is not meant to be reduced to a physical pleasure. It is at once a physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual expression of the mutual selfless love between spouses. *Any sexual encounter where the full humanity of the person is not recognized and appreciated is a counterfeit of love.*

To protect the beauty and sanctity of sexuality, the Church encourages chastity. Despite what common sentiment may portray, chastity is not an oppressive or repressive moralism in the Church. *Chastity is about saying 'yes' to this ideal of an authentic love.* Loving means choosing the good of another, even if it means sacrificing our own wants and desires. Sexual desire is a good thing, given to us by God. The virtue of chastity is about guarding the precious gift of one's sexuality in order to give that gift to one's spouse. In the mind of the Church, the virtue of chastity involves the successful integration of sexuality that holds together both the bodily and spiritual components of the human person.

Sexuality moves beyond a merely biological reality when it involves a mutual gift of a man and woman to one another for life. In the marriage union, the relationship of man and woman have the stability of a loving covenantal relationship. When the virtue of chastity is properly cultivated, human sexuality becomes something truly personal and authentically human. Incidentally, the same is no less true for one living a celibate life.

Pornography does an injustice to authentic human love. Saint John Paul II said it best when he stated, “the problem with pornography is not that it shows too much of the person, but that it shows far too little.” Instead of valuing their undeniable dignity, pornography reduces a person to a body; it shows too little. In other words, pornography reduces the human person to an object—a thing to be consumed for pleasure—rather than focusing on the person as a gift, with all the complexity of their emotional, intellectual, and spiritual reality.

Pornography subversively trains the consumer to think of sex as an equation:

ME + OBJECT = PLEASURE

This effectively cultivates a mindset that understands a person as an object or thing that will satisfy a desire we have for pleasure rather than one with dignity and beauty created in the image of God. This mindset, perpetuated by pornography, separates sexuality from every other kind of human intimacy and makes sex only about a feeling, not about love. Repeated exposure to pornography severely limits one's freedom to give and receive love completely.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY

Not everyone who views pornography becomes addicted to it, but there are countless men and women who are. The path out of the addiction cannot happen in isolation. Addiction is an illness where the one becomes a slave to one's behavior, often unable to change even if the desire is there. Pornography addiction is an illness that can bring on feelings of shame, isolation, fear, depression, and anxiety. A porn addict experiences the same physiological changes in the brain that take place in one who abuses alcohol or drugs. Those addicted to pornography need lots of support, both spiritually and professionally, in order to overcome the addiction.

AGE OF EXPOSURE

Research indicates that the earlier a person was exposed to pornography, the more difficult it will be for that person to break free from the habituated use of pornography. Because of the way dopamine interacts with a developing person's brain activity, exposure to pornography in the teenage years or before can indicate that a person will need additional or professional help to root out the addictive behavior. When you are working with a person addicted to pornography, it may be beneficial to you to ascertain a sense of their history with pornography or other sexual addiction.

FREQUENCY OF STRUGGLE

Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to change. It takes the brain at least 60-90 days to form a new response to whatever is triggering the person's addiction. That means that a porn addict must spend at least 60-90 consecutive days in a newly established routine and with newly cultivated habits in order to break free of the addictive behavior. For someone stuck in a cycle of addiction, this consistency is *very* difficult. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge one's frequency of porn use. If there is any sort of pattern to the frequency (i.e. quarterly, weekly, daily, etc.), that is a strong sign that a person has cultivated a conditioned response to a trigger. As such, an addict caught in a high frequency cycle of porn use will likely need the assistance of an entire pastoral team. In any case, support during the first 60-90 days for someone trying to break free is vitally important.

IDENTIFYING TRIGGERS

While it is possible that a person is just using pornography out of lust, usually people use pornography as a way to cope with other problems such as stress, anger, loneliness, or boredom. Helping a person to identify their emotional and environmental triggers will help them stay alert against temptation and be more prepared when they find themselves in an environment or emotional state that usually triggers the addictive process. In your pastoral work, helping people to understand their own complex emotional responses to situations and identity environments that lead them to begin the addictive process will help them to be prepared for the moments of temptation and introduce more healthy coping mechanisms. Try to understand the person's life situation and any emotional events that may contribute to their use of pornography.

DESENSITIZATION

A porn addict may mention having a change in what it takes to be satisfied either by the stimulus of porn or by sexual activity with a partner. As the brain is consistently exposed to pornography over a period of time a person may begin to crave images or videos of more extreme sex acts in order to achieve the same heightened feeling of pleasure. Consequently, it can happen that as one is desensitized to pornography, one's sexual appetite can escalate, even to the point of acting out sexually (i.e. soliciting a prostitute, sexual abuse, or even rape). The addict who suffers from severe desensitization will need to be healed within in a professional counseling setting.

ACCOUNTABILITY

It is vitally important for an addict to have support from those to whom he or she is accountable. The first step in accountability is to help strategize ways to limit access to pornographic material. This might include deleting pornographic content from computers and other devices, canceling subscription, moving the computer (or other devices) to a more public place in the home, creating deliberate times of separation from cell phones and tablets, and setting up filtering software for television, internet, phones, and tablets. These will help toward recovery, but must be used in conjunction with other methods in order to achieve success. See the resource page for some suggested software programs that allow other trusted individuals, spouses, or accountability partners to view internet history, hold one accountable, and provide encouragement in the face of setbacks.

FOCUSING ON PRAYER

Often, one who is battling pornography addiction will see one's spiritual life primarily in terms of the perceived success or failure at controlling temptations. The pastoral relationship with this individual should be oriented towards helping him or her realize that the struggle for virtue in one's life is a good thing. There is a strong urge in the addict to feel unlovable - be sure to reiterate God's abiding presence and abundant grace. Ultimately, God is Love and desires an intimate relationship with everyone, even someone addicted to porn. Another pitfall here is to provide *only* spiritual advice. As well meaning as this may be, if not careful it can lead the addict to an unhealthy spiritual life by focusing only on avoiding sin rather than cultivating virtue and gaining an adequate understanding of the physical effects of pornography.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

God desires that the person is free from this addiction. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a necessary part of a person's healing. For most people, however, it is not sufficient as the *only* means toward healing. It can be disheartening for the addicted person to continually confess the same sins with no change in behavior. Give encouragement to not give up or despair. It can help a great deal for the addict to the same person consistently for confession. This will help with personal accountability as well as the grace of the sacrament itself.

AGE APPROPRIATE TALKING POINTS

0-5 YEARS

Tell your children they are a child of God and are valuable in His sight and yours.

Create family traditions and rituals.

Remember you are your child's protector. Be a witness to love and build trust in the home.

Teach the privacy and sacredness of the body.

1-3 GRADES

Continue to remind your children they are a child of God and have great dignity.

Teach appropriate boundaries for touching and the expression of emotion.

Give permission for your child to say "no."

Begin to educate your children in the virtues.

Teach your children that they are called to be a gift. Put it in language they can understand.

Use stories to teach your children about sacrifice and giving of themselves. Often, stories of a hero in movies or books are good for initiating this conversation.

Pray with your children.

Establish accountability filters on all your devices that connect to the Internet.

4-6 GRADES

Help your children to internalize that every person is a child of God, worthy of being treated with kindness and respect for his/her dignity.

Remind children they are smart and you trust them to make good choices.

Be aware of your children's friends.

Guard against sexual exposure – a child's innocence must always be protected.

Encourage your children's sense of dignity.

Be the first to initiate conversations with your child about sexuality. Establish yourself as a place your child should turn to find out the truth about sex and sexuality.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Explain that God calls us to love one another and the opposite of love is to use someone for our own wants. To use another person is always wrong.

Praise your children for the good they do.

Teach children to set goals for themselves and help them understand how to achieve their goals and what can keep them from reaching those goals.

Listen to your children -- they need to know you care and value them.

Periodically, and without warning, parents should look through their child's mobile devices for questionable content, text messages, or apps.

When processing sexualized content (whether in pornography or advertising), discuss who is behind the message, who is it geared towards, what effect they are trying to garner, and what values it supports.

Guide appropriate dress and self-respect.

AGE APPROPRIATE TALKING POINTS

HIGH SCHOOL

Know God's plan for the gift of human sexuality in marriage and teach it to your children.

Know and explain the difference between love and infatuation.

Teach your children that the definition of love is to will the good of the other and unpack that meaning with them.

Help set healthy sexual boundaries by:

Establishing guidelines for dating.

Reminding them that pornography is a counterfeit of love.

Teaching them that sexual violence is always wrong and they should never be forced or coerced into anything sexual.

TRANSITION TO

COLLEGE

College students experience a tremendous amount of freedom very quickly once they leave home. Parents should have an intentional conversation about everything their son or daughter might be exposed to in college so they can enter with the right tools to make healthy decisions.

Repeated exposure to pornography desensitizes men and women to the reality of rape. Many studies indicate a strong connection between pornography usage and a supportive attitude toward rape. Know the facts and encourage your son or daughter to say something if they see something.

Parents have limited ability to influence decisions when college begins. Set standards of accountability on your son or daughter's mobile devices in order to minimize the temptation to view pornography.

Psychologists continually refer to this period as "post-adolescence". Your college student is an adult, but still needs your support. They will be treated as legal adults in any action related to sexual violence, drugs, alcohol, or illegal pornographic use - whether direct or complicit. Encourage them to adopt an attitude that values sexuality rather than one that engages in conversation with others that devalues sexuality by "joking" about sexual violence or sexual deviance and promotion of the "hook-up" culture.

ACCOUNTABILITY & RECOVERY RESOURCES

RECOVERY

RECLAIM SEXUAL HEALTH | reclaimsexualhealth.com – Online recovery program designed to help Catholics who are struggling with sexual addiction of any kind

THE VICTORY APP | thevictoryapp.com – An app that confidentially tracks a person's struggle with pornography and offers feedback on triggers, accountability features, journaling, and inspiration.

CATHOLIC THERAPISTS.COM | catholictherapists.com – Online database of Catholic Therapists, some opportunities for video conferencing across geographical distances

ACCOUNTABILITY

COVENANT EYES | covenanteyes.com – Catholic accountability service for those struggling with pornography that covers all devices. *Use the promo code "richmond" when purchasing for our affiliate rate.*

X3WATCH | x3watch.com – Christian accountability tool for those struggling with pornography. Covers all devices.

INFORMATION

FIGHT THE NEW DRUG | fightthenewdrug.org – Secular resource with a number of helpful resources on the science of pornography, facts, and personal accounts

CHASTITY PROJECT | chastityproject.com – Catholic resource for information, statistics, talk outlines, seminar possibilities, and chastity education

PORN EFFECT | theporneffect.com – Catholic resource for information on pornography addiction with articles, videos, and podcasts

iPARENT | iParent.tv – Christian reviews of social media apps for parents

NCOSE (NATIONAL CENTER ON SEXUAL EXPLOITATION) | endsexualexploitation.org – Advocacy organization identifies pornography as a public health crisis and provides resources revealing links between all forms of sexual exploitation

USCCB | usccb.org/cleanheart.org – Full text of Bishops' collective pastoral statement (November 2015)

The Pornography Epidemic: A Catholic Approach by Peter C. Kleponis, Ph.D.

Boys to Men by Tim Gray and Curtis Martin

Breaking Free: 12 Steps to Sexual Purity by Stephen Wood

Delivered: True Stories of Men and Women who Turned from Porn to Purity by Matt Fradd

Contrary to Love: Helping the Sexual Addict by Patrick Carnes

Every Man's Battle by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker (*plus two sequels*)

Shattered Vows by Debra Laaser

Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain by William M. Struthers

Your Sexually Addicted Spouse by B. Steffens and M. Means

ONLINE

BOOKS

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The confessional is one of the most privileged spaces in which a priest ministers to the people of God. Though the Sacrament of Confession is not necessarily meant to be a moment of spiritual direction or counseling, very often people struggling with sexual addiction or pornography need substantial help beyond the Sacrament. Those men and women burdened by any form of addiction may need pastoral or professional counseling outside of what can be provided in the confessional in order to help them to journey to recovery in a meaningful way.

The penitent suffering from addiction who only receives spiritual advice can grow to believe that his or her struggle is solely a spiritual one. Unfortunately, for the pornography addict this thought process can be very limiting and ultimately lead the penitent to an unhealthy spiritual life - one that focuses on avoiding sin without understanding the physiological and psychological effects of his or her chronic use of pornography.

It is important for a priest to notice if a person is frequently coming to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, confessing the same sexual sins time after time, and leaving the confessional just to fail again at avoiding those same sins. While confession is laudable, this practice ultimately serves to keep the penitent in a cycle of sin, shame, and repentance without ever urging him or her toward a full recovery.

When faced with a person who is stuck in this cycle, use the four questions on the facing page while in the confessional to help gauge a penitent's level of addiction to pornography so that you can give more direction:

Questions to Assist Priests

1. HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU VIEW PORNOGRAPHY?

A penitent can go to confession weekly, sometimes to different priests, and not give any indication of whether this is an occasional sin or a habitual sin. An addict will view pornography anywhere from multiple times per day to weekly. Bi-weekly or monthly pornography use, though less frequent, still may reveal an addiction. If the penitent is struggling like this, then encourage frequent confession, but with the addition of counseling outside the confessional.

2. HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU STARTED LOOKING AT PORNOGRAPHY?

Research shows that the age of exposure contributes to how deeply rooted the compulsion or addiction can become. If the penitent reveals that he or she first started viewing pornography in the early teenage years or younger (and continues to view pornography frequently) then this is often an indication that extra help will be needed.

3. HAVE YOU EVER TALKED TO ANYONE OUTSIDE OF CONFESSION? IF SO, WHO?

If the penitent has never talked about this issue outside the confessional (and shows other indicators of addiction above), then that is a strong indication he or she is stuck in a cycle of sin, shame, and repentance. It may also indicate a level of unwillingness to admit the severity of the problem. Without accountability to another person, the cycle will continue. While confiding in a friend is a good step in accountability, it may or may not be enough to break the habit. If the addiction is deeply rooted, it may take the accountability of a professional therapist to help break the cycle.

4. DO YOU WANT TO STOP?

If yes, then make sure he or she understands that frequent confession is important, but that additional steps will need to be taken outside the confessional as well. While the penance cannot be contingent on taking these additional steps, make it clear that you would like to help them with some concrete resources and pastoral support outside the confessional as well. Your goal here is to invite them into a pastoral counseling setting so that you can provide them with the appropriate resources to fight for their freedom from addiction or refer them to a counselor or therapist who is more able to walk with them through the recovery process. Try to get at least one meeting with the person so that you can offer more resources.



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