**Pornography and Virtual Infidelity**

by Paul Coughlin

The photograph was invented in 1839, and in just 11 quick years the word “pornographer” was seeded into our dictionary—unaware of the Zeus-like power and combustive fury that was to come as virtual infidelity would some day be as close as a harmless-blue Click Here.

Once a loathsome industry of photographing haggard prostitutes with drunken johns, this underground market, now more acceptable and mainstream due largely to Hugh Hefner’s Playboy magazine (first edition 1953), is today an estimated $4.9 billion behemoth. Earlier this decade the domain name business.com was sold for a record $7.5 million, as sex.com was valued at $65 million. Perhaps we should call it the Intercoursenet instead, as an estimated 28,258 people every second, mostly men (72%) but also women (28%) view pornography. Every 39 minutes a new pornographic video is being created in the United States.

**Christians Aren't Immune**

Christians aren’t immune. When surveyed, 53% of men who attended Promise Keeper said they viewed pornography that week. More than 45% of Christians admit that pornography is a major problem in their home. An anonymous survey conducted recently by Pastors.com reported that 54% of pastors admitted viewing porn within the last year. In an online newsletter, 34% of female readers of Today’s Christian Woman admitted to intentionally accessing Internet porn. One out of every six women who read Today’s Christian Woman say they struggle with addiction to pornography (Today’s Christian Woman, Fall 2003).

If only virtual infidelity were limited to viewing strangers copulate in what was once considered a sacred act just a few decades ago. In order to save, heal and protect our marriages from porn, we need to adopt a broader understanding of this pernicious and slippery world, an understanding that currently and unfairly pins most virtual infidelity on husbands.

The fact remains that electronic media, which includes the Internet, hunts both genders. More and more women are not just viewing porn, they are entering anonymous chat rooms and are more likely to act out in real life what others just type about. And as marketers know, it has always been women who have fantasized about relationships with men other than their husbands through soap operas, not to mention romance novels and magazines such as Cosmopolitan and other little sisters of porn of another kind.

The virtual infidelity that separates husband from wife is more than visual, and has been since fantasy, escape, betrayal, and the need to be held, loved, and understood—in a word connected in body and soul, which is a gift from God. Think of virtual infidelity as anything—images, wood pulp with words on it, chat rooms with words in them—that replace your current spouse with someone else in the recesses of the undisclosed regions inside you, where discontent grows and festers into a new, ugly, and unintended creation.

**Both Genders Are Tempted**

As this series explains, virtual infidelity tempts both genders in similar and divergent ways. A husband’s temptation toward visual infidelity is erosive: visible from the outside and easier to spot. A wife’s temptation is more subtle and nuanced, making it corrosive: less visible, attacking from the inside and harder to spot, acknowledge and heal.

This double-bladed sword of virtual infidelity is the result of a good desire, human connection, gone in the wrong direction and missing its mark, which is part of the definition of sin. Deep physical and emotional connection can result in a blessed state of relaxation, escape, and elation (the French word for orgasm, La petite mort, means “little death” the loss of consciousness of the world around you). All are God-given, the result of his great love for us. These blessed gifts and connections create a kind of mini-vacation from the usual stress and strain of life that creates mysterious yet real bonds. Unfortunately, virtual infidelity tempts us to take mini-vacations with someone other than our spouse. We need to learn to take them with one another—a sacred and a times difficult act.

Solutions to virtual infidelity pivot from moving from illusion to reality and from a passive to an assertive stance in marriage.

Husbands and wives need to bolster their courage and be honest about their intimacy desires, and at the same time, bolster their understanding and be realistic about that they should expect from a gender that is similar but also different.

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**The Stages of Pornography Addiction**

The progression of addiction can lead you to a place you never thought you'd go.

by Gene McConnell and Keith Campbell

Not everyone who sees porn will become addicted to it. Some will just come away with toxic ideas about women, sex, marriage and children. That kind of damage is bad enough. And porn isn't the only ingredient in addiction. Usually, those who become addicted have some kind of emotional opening that allows the addiction to really take root.

Some of you reading this will become addicted, like I was. The porn companies don't mind at all if you become completely addicted to their product. It's great for business. An addicted customer keeps coming back for more. And so they fill their porn with images that will excite you, arouse you and get the hormones flowing. You don't have to shoot up any drug with a needle to get addicted to porn — your body will make its own drugs just by looking at the pictures. Dr. Victor Cline says that sex and pornography can be a more difficult addiction to break than cocaine.

**Five Stages of Addiction**

Early exposure. Most guys who get addicted to porn start early. They see the stuff when they are very young, and it gets its foot in the door.

1. Addiction. Later comes addiction. You keep coming back to porn. It becomes a regular part of your life. You're hooked. You can't quit.

2. Escalation. After a while, escalation begins. You start to look for more and more graphic porn. You start using porn that would have disgusted you when you started. Now it excites you.

3. Desensitization. Eventually, you start to become numb. Even the most graphic, degrading porn doesn't excite you anymore. You become desperate to feel the same thrill again but can't find it.

4.Acting out sexually. At this point, many men make a dangerous jump and start acting out sexually. They move from the paper and plastic images of porn to the real world.

5. When I personally got to the "acting out phase," I started fantasizing about what it would be like to actually rape a woman. I finally tried it one night when I saw a woman who "fit" the scenario that porn had taught me to look for. I was lucky. Very lucky. I didn't go through with it. After being reported, arrested and spending some time in jail, I finally was able to begin the process of weeding out the lies in my life that porn had put there. Other men aren't so lucky. I realize now that with just a little push, I could have gone over the edge.

I could have raped that woman and then killed her to cover my tracks. That's how Ted Bundy got started. When the porn he was addicted to wasn't enough anymore, he tried the real thing — rape, and then murder. When he succeeded, he did it again. And again.

Pornography addiction is very serious.

Are You Addicted?

Some of you reading this may have already developed an addiction to porn. If you see any of the patterns I've described above in your life, you need to put the brakes on right now. Is porn beginning to control your life? You can't put it down — you keep going back for more? Perhaps you find yourself needing to see increasingly graphic pornography. You're masturbating more and more often. You're starting to take risks or act out physically for sexual thrills. If you see yourself at any point on this progression, you are in serious trouble, and you need to realize it — and get help.

Excerpted from the Dare to Dig Deeper booklet "Toxic Porn", by Gene McConnell and Keith Campbell. Copyright ©1996 Focus on the Family.

**Pornography Lies**

**Here are five things pornography teaches men about women.**

By Gene McConnell and Keith Campbell

Pornography communicates its own "truths" about women. Unfortunately, they're all lies:

1. Lie: Women are less than human. The women in Playboy magazine are called "bunnies," making them cute little animals or "playmates," making them a toy. Porn often refers to women as animals, playthings, or body parts. Some pornography shows only the body and doesn’t show the face at all. The idea that women are real human beings with thoughts and emotions is played down.

2. Lie: Women are a "sport." Some sports magazines have a swimsuit issue. This suggests that women are just some kind of sport. Porn views sex as a game and in a game: You have to win, conquer or score.

3. Lie: Women are property. It's common to see pictures of the slick car with the sexy girl draped over it. The unspoken message is, "Buy one, and you get them both." Hard-core porn carries this even further. It displays women like merchandise in a catalogue, exposing them as openly as possible for the customer to look at. It's not surprising that many young men think that if they have spent some money taking a girl out, they have a right to have sex with her. Porn tells us that women can be bought.

3. Lie: A woman's value depends on the attractiveness of her body. Overweight or less attractive women are ridiculed in porn. They are called dogs, whales, pigs or worse, simply because they don't fit into porn's criteria of the perfect woman. In fact, if someone is attracted to a heavyset woman, porn labels that a fetish, which means sexual obsession or hang-up that isn't "natural." Porn doesn’t care about a woman's mind or personality, only her body.

4. Lie: Women like rape. "When she says no, she means yes" is a typical porn scenario. Women are shown being raped, fighting and kicking at first, and then starting to like it. Porn eroticizes rape and makes it arousing. Women are shown being tied up, beaten, and humiliated in hundreds of sick ways and finally begging for more.

Even while being tortured, the porn actors and actresses have a smile on their face — a look of intense enjoyment. Porn teaches men to enjoy hurting and abusing women for entertainment.

Adapted from the Dare to Dig Deeper booklet "Toxic Porn", by Gene McConnell and Keith Campbell. Copyright © 1996 Focus on the Family

**Corrosive Influence of Porn on Wives**

One reason why pornography is more attractive to wives than husbands is its capacity for secretive retribution. By Paul Coughlin

A frustrated and grieving woman in her 20s writes to Focus on the Family: “I’m addicted to porn…It’s so frustrating to find all sorts of help out there, but only for men…Are there any articles or studies currently out there for people like me?” Her search is not fruitless, but it will not be as fruitful as a man’s search for answers. Currently, the reasons why husbands turn to porn are better known, discussed, and more public than why wives turn to pornography.

**The Seven-Year-Itch**

Of course the reasons overlap. Two are boredom and pain. Call it the seven-year-itch if you want, but eventually the home fires begin to dim in the best of marriages. We grow bored with each other’s strengths as well as weaknesses, and for some such familiarity breed’s virtual infidelity. Pain causes both genders to look for quick and convenient sources to salve it, and the deeper the pain, the further we often reach to make it go away.

Loneliness strikes at the heart of both husbands and wives, but tends to plunge deeper into the emotional expanse of women. This is one reason why wives are seduced by “emo-porn,” virtual infidelity that is more emotionally satisfying before it physically pleases. But like salt water, it creates a worsening thirst. With emo-porn, fantasy men perform stunningly between the sheets of conversation, emotional understanding, and emotional dexterity. Most mortal men cannot deliver such behavior the way men do in soap operas and romance novels. Just as wives rightly complain when compared to the artificially created women of Internet porn, men should complain when compared to the artificial men of daytime television. Interesting, isn’t it, how they have such exciting jobs—no Joe The Plumbers. In the real world where real men burn through a lot of emotional battery life to make a real living, being expected to behave like men who don’t exist is more than wrong. It’s cruel.

Emo-porn creates caricatures in the minds and hearts of wives. Most men just aren’t and cannot be that attentive, especially in marriage where responsibilities to provide weigh heavy upon them. Husbands are quietly deemed unresponsive and uncaring when compared to emotionally dexterous hunks of daytime lore, chat rooms, celebrity rags, and romance novels. Thus a secretive and snowballing form of marital discontent is born and nurtured.

**Getting Even**

One reason why pornography is more attractive to wives than husbands is its capacity for secretive retribution. Through concealed romps with other men, wives say they feel like they have “gotten back” at their husbands for hurting them for behaviors they committed or didn’t commit. It’s a passive-aggressive way of handling conflict without going through the difficult work of actually creating resolution.

Wifely virtual infidelity is less visible and more secretive, making it harder to expose and to heal. Some startling statistics to support this claim: Wives more than husbands are drawn to chat rooms and illicit relationships, rather than visual images of porn, though visual porn is still enticing (Nearly 30% of all visitors to porn sites are women).

Women, far more than men, are likely to act out their behaviors in real life, such as having multiple partners, casual sex, even affairs. Seventy percent say they keep their cyber activities secret.

Emotional and physical pleasures through fantasy behave in the most primal ways upon our minds. And when they are associated with someone who is not your husband, it becomes more difficult for him to captivate you. Virtual infidelity does not free you toward greater connection with your husband, but dilutes this connection. And given the secretive nature of virtual infidelity and a man’s more limited ability to notice minute relational cues, he is likely to think that “Everything’s okay,” in his marriage when it’s not. Worse, he’s denied the very information he needs to play his role in mending it.

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**Erosive Influence of Porn Upon Husbands**

It’s when work life and family life are at their peak—and at times at each

Other’s throats. Many men turn to porn during these exhaustive years as an

Illicit pick-me-up. by Paul Coughlin

For the surprising number of husbands who think that pornography use is “no big deal,” consider this from those who work at ground zero of divorce. During a recent meeting of divorce attorneys, two thirds of the 350 attorneys said the Internet played a significant role in the divorces in the past year, with excessive interest in online porn contributing to more than half such cases. Pornography had an almost non-existent role in divorce just 10 or so years ago.

The majority of male porn consumers are between the ages of 35-49. I highlight this fact because it provides both context and hope for the many men I talk with across the country. Just as there is fun in sin for a season, there is also a temptation toward particular sins for a season as well. For some men, this is a battle that may never have a complete resolution, but a welcomed truce.

**Ilicit Pick-Me-Up**

It is no coincidence that these years are consistently among the most difficult for men. It’s when work life and family life are at their peak—and at times at each other’s throats. Many men turn to porn during these exhaustive years as an illicit pick-me-up. And surprising to many women, they aren’t so much lusting after that one woman on the monitor; she’s merely a conduit to feeling pleasure again. In many ways, the woman on the monitor who promises so much pleasure and admiration could be any attractive woman. It’s what she provides, not who she is, that matters.

It’s here where biology is especially unkind to husbands. As the more visually inclined gender, these images have the unique capacity to both hyper-sensitize and de-sensitize us, making them especially hazardous to male souls, much like addictive drugs. They also carry with them the deceptive capacity to make the viewer believe that the object can be possessed, seducing the viewer even further into delusion.

One of the most ironic examples of how far this visual-based delusion can go is in the life of the grandfather of porn, Hugh Hefner. Sandy Bentley, a Playboy cover girl and former Hefner girlfriend, observed how Hefner “has trouble finding satisfaction through intercourse; instead, he likes the girls to pleasure each other while he masturbated and watched gay porn.”

**Unfair Trial**

Image-based virtual infidelity, so enhanced by silicon and deceptive camera angles, creates unfair comparisons to real wives who are not sexually aroused at a moment’s notice. Real wives are picked apart and found wanting, tried in the one-way court of our minds with slim chance for a fair trial. Here wives are quietly deemed undesirable and boring when compared to the artificially slim, breast implanted, and those so eager to please, contort and perform—at least when the cameras are rolling.

Nate Larkin is an author, speaker, and founder of Samson Society, a national fellowship of Christian men who are serious “but not grave” about authenticity, community, humility and recovery. He’s also a former pastor who at one time regularly viewed pornography and who now ministers to men, especially pastors. He says that it’s the perceived anonymity of the Internet that gives pastors the courage to experiment with pornography.

Why pastors look at porn, he says, is multifaceted. “First, because he’s male, and sexual curiosity is hard-wired into the male human body. Second, because he lives in a fallen world, one in which his natural sexual instincts have been warped and titillated. Third, because he works under incredible stress, his performance critiqued on a weekly basis by an unrealistic audience who insists on treating him as an asexual being or as the sole inhabitant of a higher moral plane.”

Like all men, every pastor experiences moments of despair, anger or loneliness. “At such a moment, pornography can appear to be a safe alternative to adultery. To the man who is feeling insecure but doesn’t want to cheat on his wife, a few fleeting seconds with an imaginary lover can prove irresistible.” Yet Larkin says that for a pastor to admit such a mistake, however, is fatal, forcing his sin and the reasons for it even further underground where redemption is impossible. “If anyone discovers what he’s done, he’ll be tarred and feathered and carried out of town on a rail. So what does he do? He takes his guilt to God privately and makes a private promise never to make that mistake again. And maybe he won’t. But speaking for myself, that’s how I became a porn addict.”

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**How to Help Someone Addicted to Pornography**

Pornography is wrong and addictive. If either you or a loved one has become addicted to pornography, there is help available. You do not have to continue in slavery!

**Tell someone you trust about the addiction**. The power of sin is in its darkness. The best idea is to enlist an accountability partner with whom you will promise to be honest. If you are married, you need to make confession to your spouse. If you are a minor, you need to confess to your parents. Whoever has been wronged by your actions needs a confession.

**Realize that pornography is not victimless**. The addict is the first victim. Spouses are victims. If married, you have left the sanctity of the marital vows. What? Just by looking. If unmarried, you have already cheated your future mate. There will be consequences. Just like in an athletic game, staying within the boundaries allows you to not only keep playing, but to win. Those who continually go out of bounds either get sidelined or lose. They will never be happy or find any joy in it. Love is not a feeling, but a daily act of commitment to the well being of the beloved. By it's very nature addiction to porn is a self-centered, self-absorbed way of life.

**Understand that pornography is based purely on fantasy**. Reality can never match the fantasy. Again, one is living against reality here. There will be an escalating desire for the fantasy to become reality. Eventually escalation becomes necessary. Pornography is almost like heroin on the brain.

The viewer may start off with very mild porn, but that will cease to excite. They will slowly move into harder forms. When that ceases to excite, some form of acting out will happen. It's all about choosing reality over fantasy. The reality is fairly dull. This is why so many are disappointed in marriage. Porn addicts are inordinately affected with this issue because the fantasy has become an alternative reality that can and will never be true.

**Think your way to health**. The problem is not in your hormones or your body, but the control of your mind. The problem is in your viewpoint. Viewing another human as an object instead of an individual enslaves you both.

**Begin by telling yourself the truth** - working towards a solid relationship that includes

**Improve your self-image / self-view.** You are not an animal (no matter what drivel they teach at school), at the mercy of your hormones and physical sensations. You have the ability to think and to reason. In making ourselves to be slaves of the physical, we put all reason aside and become as animals. This is not how we were created. Not only are you not an animal without reason, the person you are looking at is not an animal. At this point, this is how you are treating them. The pleasure you are getting here and now is going to have future repercussions.

**Understand the difference between the immediate and the eternal**. Every word, every deed, indeed, every thought has consequences. Once you get a grip on that reality, you are more willing to reassess what you are thinking. One of the best quotes I have ever read said that, "wisdom is knowing reality and adjusting yourself to it."

**The book "Escape from the Addiction to Pornography** - A Way Out" provides the AA blueprint for recovery and starting a recovery fellowship.

**Steps that you can take to prevent future problems**

**-Have the home computer in a public place**

**-Frequently check the computer for spyware/ad-ware/malware by installing an**

**anti-spyware program. Porn sites routinely place this stuff into computers.**

**-Use a password system so that a child can't be on the computer by themselves.**

**-Use a monitoring program (with the full knowledge of the addict)**

**-Be careful of what gets watched on TV** (partial nudity and sex scenes could certainly trigger a desire to return to porn) and make sure that magazines with sexual stories and partial nudity are not in the house. Protecting your loved ones may mean making some adjustments yourself. What doesn't bother you may bother them greatly. Try setting parental controls to block out nudity (N), brief nudity (BN) and Strong Sexual content (SC)

**Tips:**

**-**If you are a parent of a porn addict – Get them counseling right away

- If you are a porn addict confess to someone you trust and have them hold you accountable

- If you are a spouse of a porn addict, demand that they go to a counselor

- If someone you know is viewing child porn, even if it is your spouse or child, the best thing you can do is report them and get them counseling

- Put a filter on your computer such as “safe eyes” or “bsafe online”

**Warning**

- Pornography will negatively affect your relationships

- If you don’t get out of pornography you will get deeper and deeper into it.

**Things you will need**

- Courage to tell someone and not give up

- Accountability partner or group