

Pornography Addiction

One of the most disturbing things about the Internet, as most readers now know, is the easy access that people have to pornography. With a couple of clicks of mouse adults, teenagers, and children alike gain entry into pornographic sites that have sexually explicit images that range from the erotic to the disturbing and depraved.

As someone who works with a range of people who are either perpetrators or victims of abuse I am increasingly aware of the degree to which men become addicted to pornography. It is an issue that did not appear much in my work ten years ago, but one that appears regularly now.

It is not unusual to meet a female client now who has become worried about the behaviour of her husband or partner. When men become addicted to pornography they engage in patterns of predictable behaviours that begins to damage both themselves and their relationships. Women will notice their partner locked in a room with a computer, staying up late at night to “work on the computer”, bringing computer work home, etc. The computer becomes the man’s companion and his relationship with it becomes increasingly private and excessive.

Many men do not realize that their viewing of pornography has become addictive and they would argue that, like an alcoholic, they could stop at any time. What I find with men who have admitted to their problem is that they discovered they could not stop. In fact they may have tried to stop only to discover that after a period of time they were back into it as heavily as before.

When working with these men I will typically help them to understand their addictive cycle. That is, they will typically have a predictable sequence of events before, during, and after an episode with pornography.

The trigger to begin to access pornography may begin with being alone, feeling depressed, or feeling some form of self-loathing or self-pity. This may be as a consequence of an understimulated life and unhappy life, or because of a general slothfulness. Once this trigger is felt the man will anxiously seek an opportunity to access pornography. It initially serves a kind of self-soothing function but quickly develops into something more sinister.

One man I worked with would tell his partner he had to go into work, another would claim the need to withdraw to his room to work on some projects without being disturbed, another claimed he could not sleep and wanted to stay up late, another caused some form of argument that would justify his need for privacy. Whatever the method, the man would get his time to access the material.

The next step in the cycle involves the man searching for and looking at material. The reason why accessing pornography is addictive is because at this stage there is a physical effect to which the man becomes addicted. This is why we call it an addiction – without the physical effects there would be no addictive compulsion. The men get addicted to the rush, the thrill, the danger, the excitement, and the masturbatory sexual release associated with entering into this strange world of physical excitement and

power. The pornographic sites bestow an extraordinary power on the user because he has the ability to get people on his screen to do anything. The physical rush associated with this for an otherwise weak or insecure man is huge. To understand why pornography is dangerous for many people one has to understand the physical thrill associated with power and sex.

Every man I have worked with has understood and admitted to this. How not just his voyeuristic mind, but his body gets addicted to the rush associated with the thrill and power to be able to access and view material that pushes the boundaries of fantasy and eroticism.

It is so important that women and men appreciate and understand the darker dynamics that are at work when one enters this kind of compulsive world. The defense of people who become addicted to pornography is that they do it as a personal choice, because they are liberated in their views of sexuality, that it is perfectly normal, and that it is harmless.

However, many of the men I have worked with eventually admit that their excuses were smoke screens. That their addiction to pornography had begun to eat at their self-esteem, damage their relationships, interfere with their work efficiency, and begun to intrude into the corners of their domestic, emotional, and work lives.

Most adults appreciate erotic material and intuitively know the feel of healthy sexuality. Equally, you can intuitively know when a line is crossed that moves into a world that causes a degradation of others or of the self. Trust yourself on this one.