

The
Sports Illustrated
Swimsuit Edition

&

the **Plague** of
Pornography



The Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition and the plague of pornography

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Sports Illustrated recently released its annual swimsuit edition. This publication has grown more controversial over the years as its swimsuits have gotten smaller and are often missing altogether. The issue has been called the "annual celebration of female objectification and the heterosexual male gaze."¹ In other words, lust.

It has been noted that across the 57 years *Sports Illustrated* has been published, a woman appears on the cover of a non-swimsuit issue just over once a year, on average. When the 2011 edition came out, Sherri Shepherd of *The View* called it "Christian *Playboy*," referring to the fact that most Christians would not subscribe to *Playboy* but many would consume the *SI* issue lustfully. Whoopi Goldberg responded, "I don't think this is Christian anything."²

Their debate raises an important question: just what is pornography? After we address that issue, we'll look at a few other myths and questions about this destructive plague.

What is pornography?

Webster defines "pornography" as "movies, pictures, magazines, etc., that show or describe naked people or sex in a very open and direct way in order to cause sexual excitement."³ For our purposes, we'll define it using the last phrase. "Art" becomes "pornography" when it is created and/or viewed "in order to cause sexual excitement"—i.e., with lustful intent. Some who view a Victoria's Secret fashion show may have a genuine interest in the fashions on display, but most watch with lustful thoughts, making the show pornographic for them.

As we will see, such temptation is more accessible to us than ever before in human history. Donna Rice Hughes, leader of a nonprofit that works to make the Internet safer for children and families, notes: "If you don't think you can fall into any kind of sexual temptation, you're either godlier than David, wiser than Solomon, or stronger than Samson."⁴

Isn't pornography a "man's problem"?

In 2003, *Today's Christian Woman* discovered that one out of every six women (Christians included) admitted struggling with addiction to pornography. A 2006 survey

released by *Internet Filter Review* showed that 17 percent of women struggle with porn, and that one in three visitors to porn sites are women.

According to *2008 Internet Pornography Statistics*, about 30 percent of Internet porn consumers are women. A 2006 poll found that 9.4 million women access adult websites each month, and that 13 percent of women admit to accessing pornography while at work.⁵

How widespread is pornography?

There was a day when pornography was transmitted primarily through magazines such as *Playboy*. With more than 2.4 billion people now online,⁶ porn has seen an absolute explosion in accessibility and popularity.

First, let's consider Internet pornography:

- There are 4.2 million porn websites currently in operation (12 percent of all websites).
- Search engines receive 68 million requests for porn every day (25 percent of total search engine requests).
- Of all Internet users, 42.7 percent view porn.
- More than 100,000 websites offer illegal child pornography.⁷
- 20 percent of men admit to accessing a porn website at work.
- 40 percent of adults in the U.S. regularly visit porn websites.
- Of college and graduate students (ages 18 to 26), 69 percent of men and 10 percent of women view pornography more than once a month.
- The United States has 244,661,900 porn web pages. The next highest contributor to Internet porn is Germany, with 10,030,200 web pages.⁸

Pornography on mobile devices:

- 1 in 5 mobile searches are for pornography.
- 24 percent of smartphone owners admit to having pornographic material on their mobile device.
- By 2015, mobile pornographic video consumption on tablets will triple.⁹

Pornography in video:

- Americans rent upwards of 800 million porn videos and DVDs each year.
- Of all rented movies, one in five is pornographic.
- The 11,000 porn films produced each year far outpace Hollywood's annual output of 400.¹⁰
- Every 39 minutes, a new pornographic video is created in the U.S.

- The number of hard-core porn videos and DVD titles in the U.S. grew tenfold between 1988 and 2005.¹¹

Pornography and children:

- The average age for a child to be exposed to pornography is 11 years old. This usually happens while they are doing homework.
- 90 percent of 8- to 16-year-olds have been to a porn site.
- According to a global survey of 19,000 parents, children as young as six are accessing porn.
- The largest age group of porn users is 12- to 17-year olds.
- 70 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds visit porn sites monthly.¹²

Isn't pornography just harmless entertainment?

It is often claimed that porn is entertainment and should be protected as free speech. How harmful is pornography?

Effects on men

Studies have found that viewing people's bodies, as opposed to their faces, makes us judge those people as less intelligent, less ambitious, less competent and less likable. One neuroimaging experiment found that when men viewed pictures of sexualized women, this action lowered activity in brain regions associated with thinking about other people's minds.¹³

Effects on women

Pornography degrades and brutalizes women. It utilizes three basic themes: (1) All women want sex from all men at all times; (2) women enjoy every sex act that men perform or demand; and (3) any woman who does not realize this at first can be "turned on" easily with a little force.¹⁴

Many women involved in pornographic photos and videos are being exploited by force and coercion. Psychological and physical damage is common, as is heavy alcohol and drug use. In addition, pornography leads men to degrade and dehumanize women. According to one expert: "As pornography has become more acceptable, both legally and culturally, the level of brutality toward, and degradation of, women has intensified."¹⁵

Gail Dines, author of *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, warns: "We are now bringing up a generation of boys on cruel, violent porn. . . . Given what we know about how images affect people, this is going to have a profound influence on their sexuality, behavior and attitudes toward women."

Effects on children and youth

Another expert notes: "There is evidence that the prevalence of pornography in the lives of many children and adolescents is far more significant than most adults realize, that pornography is deforming the healthy sexual development of these young viewers, and that it is used to exploit children and adolescents."¹⁶

A study of 804 representative Italian teenagers found that boys who viewed pornography were significantly more likely to report having "sexually harassed a peer or having forced somebody to have sex."¹⁷ Men who habitually view pornography have a higher tolerance for abnormal sexual behaviors, sexual aggression, promiscuity, and rape. Some begin to view women and even children as "sex objects."¹⁸

There is abundant evidence that pornography is being used by adolescents to coerce each other into sexual behavior. In one study, 29 of 30 juvenile sex offenders had been exposed to X-rated magazines or videos.¹⁹ India is considering laws banning all pornography distribution and viewing, amid rising evidence that watching porn leads to sexual assault.²⁰

In addition to the effects of porn on youth, we should consider ways adolescents are victimized by the porn industry. An estimated 293,000 American youths are currently at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The majority of these victims are runaway or "throw-away" youths who live on the streets and become involved with prostitution.²¹

In a study of arrested child pornography possessors, 40 percent were found to have sexually victimized children. Child pornography has now become a \$3 billion annual industry.²² Approximately 30 million children have been sexually exploited in the last 30 years; the average age of a trafficked victim is 12-14 years old.²³

Adults who chronically consume pornography become visually desensitized and eventually begin viewing depictions they would have previously rejected as off-limits. For instance, numerous users report to clinicians the slippery slope from using pornography featuring adults to using child pornography.²⁴ Such desensitization can lead to other forms of violence as well.

Effects on marriage

According to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers:

- 68 percent of divorce cases involve one party meeting a new paramour over the Internet.

- 56 percent involve one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites.
- 47 percent involve spending excessive time on the computer.
- 33 percent involve spending excessive time in chat rooms.²⁵

Can people really be addicted to pornography?

Donna Rice Hughes calls pornography "the drug of the millennium and more addictive than crack cocaine."²⁶ Counselors have identified the five stages of pornographic addiction:

1. *Early exposure.* Most who become addicted to porn start early.
2. *Addiction.* The person keeps coming back to porn. It becomes a regular part of his or her life, so that the person can't quit.
3. *Escalation.* The person starts looking for more and more graphic porn. A key: the viewer starts using porn that would have disgusted him or her earlier. Now such images excite the person.
4. *Desensitization.* Even the most graphic, degrading porn doesn't excite the viewer anymore. The person becomes desperate to feel the same thrill again but can't find it.
5. *Acting out sexually.* At this point, many make a dangerous jump and start acting out what they have seen. They move from the paper and plastic images of porn to the real world.²⁷

Is pornography a problem for Christians?

Consider these facts:

- About 47 percent of Christians say pornography is a problem in their home. Regular Christian visitors to porn sites are 72 percent male, 28 percent female.
- A Christian missions agency reports that 80 percent of new applicants admit to viewing porn. The agency no longer asks "if," but "how often."
- One youth minister estimated that 90 percent of the kids who come to him for help (all from Christian families) are addicted to porn.
- 21 percent of Christian girls admit to texting a sexually explicit picture of themselves.²⁸
- The number of Christian women who struggle with porn addiction has grown from 17 percent to 40 percent since 2003. 68 percent of women surveyed admitted to watching pornography frequently.²⁹

What about pastors? According to a *Christianity Today* survey, nearly 40 percent of pastors are struggling with pornography. They are especially vulnerable, as they spend a significant amount of time alone, use computers often, and fear getting help because of

the public nature of their jobs. The issue has been called "one of the fastest growing problems in the lives of North American pastors today."³⁰

How can you block Internet pornography?

Only three percent of pornographic websites require proof-of-age before granting access to sexually explicit material. Two-thirds of porn sites do not include any adult-content warnings.³¹

Internet filters can be a very helpful tool in preventing access to online porn. The software programs listed below provide filtering services and also various forms of accountability. Some alert accountability partner(s) with regular updates on web history and immediate alerts for attempts to access porn. Our ministry is aware of these options:

- X3church (www.xxxchurch.com)
- Mobicip (www.mobicip.com)
- Covenant Eyes (www.covenanteyes.com)
- Internet Safety's Safe Eyes (www.internetsafety.com).

Make sure you use a program that includes screening for iOS and/or Android mobile devices. And consider IT options that provide accountability for all Internet viewing. Many websites now display images which would not be pornographic on a level that filters would flag, but are nonetheless suggestive and dangerous. There are programs that enable parents or employers to know a computer's complete Internet history. Such resources can help prevent web viewing that will lead to further pornographic sin.

But note that no filter or software can provide complete protection. Heart change through Jesus' transforming power is the ultimate answer, as we'll see below. But these tools can help provide a safer environment for that heart change to take place.

What spiritual resources can help?

As we have seen, Christians and even pastors are not immune from the plague of pornography. But the Holy Spirit has the power to break any chain. As members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), we are responsible to help and encourage each other:

Brothers, if anyone is caught in a transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1-2).

Christian counseling is a very important way God uses his people to minister to each other. Most of us carry baggage after years of living in a fallen world. A wise counselor can help us discover areas of unforgiveness, shame and guilt, some of which may motivate involvement in pornography.

There is no shame in seeking out such help. Proverbs 20:5 says, "The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out." Most Christian leaders have mentors and counselors whom they trust regularly for wisdom and advice. Your church leaders can recommend excellent resources in your area.

Support groups for those battling addiction are another tool used by the Spirit to heal God's people. One excellent option is Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered program using a form of the 12-step program pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous. CR groups generally meet weekly, and have helped thousands of believers recover from addictions. As with Christian counseling, these groups are confidential. To see if a group meets in your area, consult their website (www.celebraterecovery.com).

For pastors struggling with pornography, confidential online communities and resources are becoming more common. Covenant Eyes has a page with resources for pastors who battle this issue (www.covenanteyes.com/pastorhelp/resources-for-pastors-who-struggle). Remember God's promise: "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

A note to parents: as we have seen, 90 percent of youth have seen a porn site by the age of 16. If your children find online porn images, don't be shocked. Above all, don't make them feel ashamed. If you do, they will hide future online activity and the power of the sin will continue to grow. Instead, cultivate an environment in which you and your children can talk freely about this issue.

When your children spend the night at friends' homes, warn them beforehand that they may see things that you don't see at your home. Ask them to tell their friend, "My parents don't want me to watch this." And make plans to talk together about what they've seen when they return home. For more parenting tips, see "When Your Child is Looking at Porn: A Step-By-Step Guide for Christian Parents,"³² parents' guides from ConnectSafely,³³ and iParent.tv.³⁴

Conclusion

I'm writing this paper in Dallas, Texas, home to some of the largest churches in the world. Yet in 2012, our city ranked second globally in highest-percentage of searches for "porn." New Delhi, with 16 million (10 times the population of Dallas), ranked first.³⁵ Of all known child abuse domains, 58 percent are housed in the U.S.³⁶ Clearly, living in a "religious" culture is no guarantee that the plague of pornography will not find us.

Every temptation is a version of the first temptation: "you will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). Every time we sin, we declare ourselves to be our own god, the king of our own kingdom. C. S. Lewis exposed the satanic deception behind pornography when he had a "senior tempter" explain this strategy to a "junior tempter" he was mentoring:

Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy's ground.

I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage to humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees which He has forbidden.

Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable. An ever-increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain; and it's better style. To get the man's soul and give him nothing in return—that is what really gladdens Our Father's Heart.³⁷

The ultimate answer to sin is submission to Jesus as our King and Lord. Only he can satisfy the desires pornography promises but fails to meet. G. K. Chesterton was right: "Any man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God."

Know that it will never be easier to refuse pornographic temptation or to get help for addiction to porn than it is right now. Scripture warns us: "Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (James 1:14-15).

In 1780, philosopher Immanuel Kant noted that "sexual love makes of the loved person an Object of appetite." After that appetite is fulfilled? The loved one "is cast aside as one casts away a lemon which has been sucked dry." In *The Mortification of Sin*, John Owen observes:

Sin aims always at the utmost; every time it rises up to tempt or entice, if it has its own way it will go out to the utmost sin in that kind. Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could, every thought of unbelief would be atheism if allowed to develop. Every rise of lust, if it has its way reaches the height of villainy; it is like the grave that is never satisfied. The deceitfulness of sin is seen in that it is modest in its first proposals but when it prevails it hardens men's hearts, and brings them to ruin.³⁸

Pornography, like all sin, will always take us further than we wanted to go, keep us longer than we wanted to stay, and cost us more than we wanted to pay. But "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Crissy Moran's story is proof that God's power is greater than the power behind the plague of pornography. After her parents split up, she became very rebellious as a teenager. One of her boyfriends promised to marry her if she became pregnant, but when she did, he changed his mind and took her to get an abortion. She dealt with the depression that followed by writing letters to her baby.

One day she was surfing the Internet when she found a modeling website. She put her pictures up on the site, but every person who contacted her wanted her to do nude modeling. She eventually agreed and soon became involved in the pornography industry.

"I always had that hope that somebody would rescue me," she remembers. "I always wanted something more." But she came to believe that "this is just how life is. This is how men are, and this is how it's going to be." She was extremely depressed, so "I cried out to God and said, 'God, if you're real, you need to tell me. You need to send me a sign, to let me know, because everything I know about love is twisted and perverted.'"

Soon after, Crissy was having a casual conversation with a man who asked what she did. She eventually admitted that she worked in pornography. He asked, "Do you believe in God?" She remembers: "In that moment, I knew that God had sent this person to speak to me, because nobody had mentioned God to me since I was a little girl. He shared how much God loved me and that he was my Father and loves me with a fatherly love."

They prayed together. Tears streaming down her face, she repented and asked God to forgive her. As she chose to get out of the porn industry, she found a great deal of Christian support online. It took time for her to forgive herself and accept God's forgiveness for her. But Crissy Moran eventually came to learn that she is a new creation, and "that's what gave me freedom."³⁹

Why, in God's providence, are you reading this essay? Is it so you can find that same freedom in Christ? Is it so you can share his freedom with someone trapped in the plague of pornography? How will you respond to the transforming grace of Jesus today?

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