

The Serious Mental Costs of Watching Porn

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The following article is a guest piece written by Dan Gray (LCSW, CSAT), the Clinical Director and co-founder at Lifestar Therapy. He has a master's degree in social work and is a CSAT (Certified Sexual Addiction Therapist). He is also certified as an addictions counselor with the National Association of Forensic Counselors.

How many times have you asked yourself: is pornography really harmful? Guess what, it is. Pornography is addictive, which in the long run rewires the brain, kills relationships, and can lead to abusive relationships against women and men.

With the internet, pornography has been easier for anyone and everyone to access. Today, 68% of young men and 18% of young women view porn at least once a week and those numbers are growing. A pornography epidemic is on the rise, not only because it is easier to access, but because of the lack of information people have had on the negative and harmful effects associated with the addiction.

We do know that pornography and other addictions are used as self-medicating tools, which can lead to depression. More research is being conducted and more evidence is arising to show the damaging effects pornography and other sexual addictions have on our brains, body, relationships, and life.

As people delve further into pornography addiction, here are 3 factors that come into play:

Pornography and Depression

It is hard to say what comes first, the pornography addiction or depression. However, pornography and other addictions are used to make the user (temporarily) forget about feelings of sadness, fear, anger, or boredom. This habit can quickly lead to depression and is also something depression can lead to. It's like a chicken and egg scenario: you're not really sure which one comes first, but in this case you sure don't want to find out because it can very quickly affect your mental health.

Pornography, along with other addictions, floods the brain with dopamine and makes us feel good. Over time, as more dopamine is released, you will feel the effects of the dopamine less and less, which leads people to search for hardcore porn and other stronger substances to feel good.

For many, pornography is a substitute for the feeling of happiness. As you numb yourself with graphic sexual images and videos, you are missing out on building some real, amazing relationships with your spouse, friends, and community. In the end, no amount of pornography will take away your problems. In fact, it will just become one of them.

Mental Anxiety

Pornography addiction damages relationships and takes a toll on your overall mental, physical, and emotional health. Through pornography, many try to cover up how they are truly feeling about themselves, relationships, and other aspects in their life they aren't happy with. In the end, not only have they missed out on finding/experiencing genuine love, but are left feeling even worse about themselves and their circumstances.

The guilt and shame associated with sexual addiction can be detrimental to your sense of self-worth, accomplishment, and the way you interact with others. If you have a low self-worth, pornography addiction only fuels the fire and pulls you farther down the spiral of despising yourself more and continuing to participate in the destructive behaviors.

Disconnect

Pornography addiction has a huge negative impact on relationships. As humans, we are designed to have relationships and build connections with others. We need the social interaction and sense of community, not the fake intimacy that pornography provides. The more people become addicted to pornography, the more they start missing out on building those connections.

As addicts turn more towards pornography and sexual addiction, they may lose their desire for real sex altogether. Sex becomes not as exciting as the pornography and soon the viewer is dealing with serious sexual problems. Emotionally, porn addicts become more withdrawn from those they love. Their addiction pulls them away from their friends and family, making them miss out, and disconnect with those they love.

Overcoming the Addiction

If you are struggling with pornography and sexual addictions, there is hope. Find a close friend, support group, or therapist that you can talk to. By first admitting you have a problem, you can move forward with your healing. No one should have to miss out on life because of their addiction.

In the end, we all need to keep spreading the word that pornography is harmful. No longer can we afford to turn a blind eye as more people, men and women, are pulled into the seductive charms of pornography. There is nothing romantic about pornography. Instead, it promotes an unrealistic view of true intimacy and healthy relationships.