



HOW PORN AFFECTS THE BRAIN LIKE A DRUG

On the surface, cocaine and porn don't seem to have a lot in common but studies are showing that viewing pornography tricks your brain into releasing the same pleasure chemicals that drugs do. What's more is your brain actually begins to rewire itself because of this artificial stimulation. It may sound crazy, but it's true.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *To your brain, porn has the same effects as drugs.*
- *Porn hijacks the reward pathway in the brain.*
- *Just like drugs, you build up a tolerance so you need more porn for the same effects.*
- *Withdrawal symptoms can occur when you try and walk away.*

On the surface, cocaine and porn don't seem to have a lot in common. One is purchased in seedy alleyways; the other is free to download. One habit can get expensive pretty fast, while the other is about the price of a high-speed Internet connection. Besides, Hugh Hefner doesn't exactly conjure up images of a cartel drug lord.

So where's the similarity? Inside the brain.

In case you're not a neurosurgeon, here's a crash course in how the brain works. Deep inside your brain, there's something called a "reward pathway." You've got one. Your cat's got one. For mammals, it comes standard. The reward pathway's job is to help keep you alive by doing exactly what its name promises: rewards you, or more specifically, rewards you when you do something that promotes life, such as eating food or achieving something you've worked hard for. And the way it rewards you is by releasing chemicals in your brain—mainly one called dopamine, but also others like oxytocin.

Normally, these chemicals are really handy. They help us feel pleasure and to bond with other people, and they motivate us to come back to important activities that make us happy. The problem is, the reward pathway can be hijacked.

The way substances like cocaine and opioids make users feel high is by triggering the reward pathway to release unnaturally high levels of dopamine without making the user do any of the work to earn it. Want to guess what else does that? Porn.

And that surge of dopamine is causing more than just feelings. As it goes pulsing through the brain, dopamine helps to create new brain pathways that essentially lead the user back to the behavior that triggered the chemical release.

The more a drug user hits up or a porn user looks at porn, the more those pathways get wired into the brain, making it easier and easier for the person to turn back to using, whether they want to or not.

Over time, the constant overload of chemicals causes other brain changes as well. Just like a junkie will eventually require more and more of a drug to get a buzz or even just feel normal, porn users can quickly build up a tolerance as their brains adapt to the high levels of dopamine that porn releases. In other words, even though porn is still releasing dopamine into the brain, the user can't feel its effects as much.

That's because the brain is trying to protect itself from the overload of dopamine by getting rid of some of its chemical receptors, which act like tiny catcher's mitts that receive the dopamine released. With fewer receptors, the brain thinks less dopamine is there and the user doesn't feel as strong a reaction. As a result, many porn users have to find more porn, find it more often, or find a more extreme version—or all three—to generate even more dopamine to feel excited.

And once a porn user becomes accustomed to a brain pulsing with these chemicals, trying to cut back on the habit can lead to withdrawal symptoms, just like with drugs. While people often think of porn as something that's been around forever, today's version of porn is a whole new ball game. Thanks to the Internet, porn now mixes the most powerful natural dopamine release the body can produce with a cocktail of other elements—endless novelty, shock, and surprise—all of which increase the dopamine surge. And because Internet porn offers an endless stream of variety, users can flip to a new image every time their high starts to fade, keeping dopamine levels elevated for hours.

Describing porn's effect to a U.S. Senate committee, Dr. Jeffrey Satinover of Princeton University said, "It is as though we have devised a form of heroin 100 times more powerful than before, usable in the privacy of one's own home and injected directly to the brain through the eyes."

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HOW PORN CHANGES THE BRAIN

Neurons that fire together, wire together. Just like other addictive substances, porn floods the brain with dopamine. That rush of brain chemicals happening over and over again rewires the brain's reward pathway ultimately changing the make up of the viewer's brain. This can result in an increased appetite for porn.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Watching porn lays down new neuro-pathways in your brain.*
- *The more you use, the stronger the neuro-connections and the more difficult it is stop.*
- *That doesn't mean you can't stop. You can rebuild those pathways by avoiding pornography and seeking healthy alternatives.*

Yep, you read that right. Porn physically changes your brain. One of the most exciting developments in our understanding of the brain in the last two decades is the discovery of something called neuroplasticity, “neuro” meaning brain and “plasticity” meaning changeability. In other words, scientists have discovered that your brain is a lot like a never-ending game of Tetris, constantly laying down new pathways based on your experiences. [1]

To explain how it works, brain scientists have a saying: Neurons that fire together, wire together. [2]

If you're wondering what a neuron is and why it's on fire, here's what that means. A neuron is a brain cell, and when brain cells get activated at the same time by something you see or hear or smell or whatever, they release chemicals that help strengthen the connection between those neurons. [3] For example, when you eat something delicious, your brain releases dopamine, a chemical that makes you feel good. [4] Or if you hold hands with someone you care about, your brain releases a chemical called oxytocin, which helps you bond with people. [5]

So if every time you went to visit your Uncle Carl he gave you a big hug and then took you out for ice cream, you'd probably start feeling pretty great about Uncle Carl, since your brain would build pathways connecting Uncle Carl with feeling happy and loved. You have these kinds of brain pathways for all sorts of things: riding a bike, eating a sandwich, and walking the dog. And when a person looks at porn, their brain creates new pathways for that, too. [6]

Just like other addictive substances, porn floods the brain with dopamine. [7] But since the brain gets overwhelmed by the constant overload of chemicals that comes with consistent porn use, it fights back by taking away some of its dopamine receptors [8]—which are like tiny ears on the end of a neuron that hear dopamine's message. With fewer receptors, even if the brain is putting

off the same levels of dopamine in response to porn, the user can't feel dopamine's effect as much. [9] As a result, the porn they were looking at doesn't seem as arousing or exciting, and many porn users go hunting for more porn or more hardcore porn to get the effect the old porn used to offer. [10]

As a frequent porn user's brain acclimates to the new levels of dopamine flooding through it, regular activities that would normally set off a burst of dopamine and make the person feel happy aren't strong enough to register much anymore, leaving the user feeling down or uneasy whenever they go for a while without looking at porn. [11] That's one reason why pornography can be so addictive. [12] (See Porn is Addictive)

Once addiction sets in, the user has a whole new set of problems, because addiction damages the part of the brain that helps you think things through to make good choices—the brain's limit setting system. [13] For more than 10 years, studies have shown that drug addictions can cause the brain's frontal lobes to start shrinking. [14] While “frontal lobe” sounds really technical, basically it's the part of the brain that controls logical problem solving and decision making. [15] But recent studies have found that it's not just drugs that cause that kind of damage—the same problems show up with other kinds of addictions, such as overeating, Internet addictions, and sexual compulsion. [16]

And here's the really scary part: the more porn a person looks at, the more severe the damage to their brain becomes and the more difficult it is to break free. [17] But there's good news too: neuroplasticity works both ways. That means that the damage to the brain can be undone when someone gets away from unhealthy behaviors.

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HOW PORN CAN BECOME ADDICTIVE

It wasn't very long ago that doctors and researchers believed that in order for something to be addictive, it had to involve an outside substance that you physically put into your body, like cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs. Science is now showing that different types of behaviors can cause addictions too, and viewing pornography is one of them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Porn can be addictive because of the level of neuro-chemicals released into the reward pathway.*
- *A tolerance can be built to porn and you end up needing more of it in more extreme forms.*

“P ornographers promise healthy pleasure and relief from sexual tension, but what they often deliver is an addiction, tolerance, and an eventual decrease in pleasure.”

—Norman Doidge, MD, *The Brain That Changes Itself* [1]

It wasn't very long ago that doctors and researchers believed that in order for something to be addictive, it had to involve an outside substance that you physically put into your body, like cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs. [2]

Once we got a peek into the brain, however, our understanding of how addictions work changed. [3] It turns out, cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs have more in common than you might think. Sure, on the outside, some are poured into a glass while others are lit on fire and smoked. But once they're in the body, they all do the same thing to the brain: flood it with a chemical called dopamine. [4] That's what makes them addictive. And porn does the exact same thing. [5]

You see, your brain comes equipped with something called a “reward pathway.” [6] Its job is to motivate you to do things that keep you and your genes alive—things like eating or having sex to produce babies. [7] The way it rewards you is by releasing dopamine into your brain, because dopamine makes you feel good. [8]

However, just because your brain has adapted to motivate you to do something doesn't mean it's always good for you. For example, your brain produces higher levels of dopamine when you have chocolate cake than it does for whole-wheat bread. [9] Why? Because 3,000 years ago, high-calorie foods were really hard to come by, so when our ancestors found them, it was important that they eat a whole bunch while the getting was good. [10] These days, a bag of Oreos is only as far as the nearest supermarket. If we gorged on them every chance we got, chances are we'd get heart disease, gain weight, and develop a bunch of other health problems.

Porn is basically sexual junk food. When a person is looking at porn, their brain thinks they're seeing a potential mating opportunity, and pumps the brain full of dopamine. [11] And unlike healthy sexual relationships that build up over time with an actual person, porn offers an endless stream of hyper-sexual images that flood the brain with high levels of dopamine every time the user clicks to a new image. [12]

Setting your brain up for an overload of feel-good chemicals might sound like a good idea at first, but just like with junk food, what feels like a good thing, in this case isn't at all. Because porn use floods the brain with high chemical levels, the brain starts to fight back. Over time, the brain will actually cut down on its dopamine receptors—the tiny landing docs that take the dopamine in once it's been released in your brain. [13] As a result, porn that once excited a person often stops having the same effect, and the user has to look at more porn, look at porn more often, or find a more hardcore version—or all three—to get aroused. [14]

Eventually, as the brain acclimates to the overload of dopamine, users often find that they can't feel normal without that dopamine high. [15] Little things that used to make them happy, like seeing a friend or playing their favorite sport, can't compete with the dopamine flood that comes with porn, so they're left feeling anxious or down until they can get back to it. [16]

On top of that, dopamine doesn't travel alone. When the brain is getting a hit of dopamine, it's also getting new pathways built into it with a protein called “iFosB” (pronounced delta fos b). [17]

Essentially, iFosB's job is to help you remember to do things that feel good or are important. [18] While dopamine is motivating your brain to do things and rewarding it for doing them, iFosB is quietly leaving trail markers in your brain, creating a pathway to help you get back

there. [19] When this happens with healthy behaviors, it's a very good thing. However, as little as one dose of many drugs will also cause iFosB to start building up in the brain's neurons, and of course porn's powerful dopamine surge causes iFosB to build up as well. [20]

The more a user looks at porn, the more iFosB accumulates, [21] essentially beating down the brain pathways leading to using, making it easier and easier for the user to turn back to that behavior, whether they want to or not. [22] Eventually, if enough iFosB accumulates, it can "flip a genetic switch," causing irreversible changes in the brain that leave the user more susceptible to addiction. [23]

And for teens, the risks are especially high, since a teen brain's reward pathway has a response two to four times more powerful than an adult brain—which means teen brains release even higher levels of dopamine. [24] Teen brains also produce higher levels of iFosB, leaving them extra vulnerable to addiction. [25]

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HOW PORN AFFECTS YOUR SEXUAL TASTE

Many porn users find themselves getting aroused by things that used to disgust them or that go against what they think is morally right. And once they start watching extreme and dangerous sex acts, these porn users are being taught that those behaviors are more normal and common than they are.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Porn users tend to think that what they see in porn is normal and even expect it from their partner.*
- *Habitual users have more accepting attitudes of violence and report feeling less empathy for rape victims.*

Have you ever heard the phrase “Monkey see, monkey do”? It sounds simple, but it’s actually an illustration of some pretty complex brain science.

You see, monkeys, humans, and other mammals all have something in their brain called a “reward pathway.” [1] Part of the reward pathway’s job is to promote healthy living by rewarding you when you do something that either keeps you alive (e.g., eating) or creates a new life (e.g., sex) [2], or enriches your life with satisfying experiences and relationships. [3]

The way it rewards you is by pumping chemicals, especially one called “dopamine,” through your brain (See *Porn Changes the Brain*). [4] Dopamine makes you feel great, but its effects are not just temporary. While you’re enjoying that good feeling, it’s also building new pathways into your brain connecting together the different parts of the experience you had so you can remember to do that again. [5] That’s why the types of behaviors we link our pleasure response to tend to become habits and stick around. When this chemical learning process happens with healthy behaviors it helps us live well, but when it happens with secretive and unhealthy behaviors it has the opposite effect.

So when someone is looking at porn, while they think they’re just being entertained, their brain is busy at work building pathways between whatever’s happening on their screen and feelings of arousal. [6] Here’s where it gets tricky: The kind of porn a user watches can—and usually does—change over time. [7] So as their brain continually wires together what they’re seeing with feeling aroused, what turns them on can change too. [8]

A few years ago, a researcher named Jim Faust did an experiment with rats. [9] As you’d probably guess, rats usually don’t like the smell of death. But Faust found a way to change that instinct. Faust put virgin male rats in cages with female rats that had been sprayed with a liquid that smelled like dead, rotting rat. As it turned out, the drive to mate was

more powerful than the instinct to avoid the smell, and the rats hit it off.

Once the male rats learned to associate sex with the smell of death, Faust put them in cages with dowels soaked in the same death smell. Consistently the male rats would play with the smelly dowels as though it were soaked in something they loved.

If you’re wondering how rats could possibly be trained to go against such a powerful natural instinct, the answer is dopamine. Since dopamine is released during sex, the rats’ brains wired together the pleasure of dopamine’s release with the rotten smell.

Sounds pretty gross, right? Well here’s the thing—remember how we said all mammals have the same reward pathway in their brain? Those rats’ preferences were rewired into their brains with the same process that many porn users’ brains go through when they look at porn. [10] And more often than not, the images their brains are wiring sexual arousal to get more and more extreme. [11]

In a 2012 survey of 1,500 guys, 56% said their tastes in porn had become “increasingly extreme or deviant.” [12] Because consistent porn users’ brains quickly become accustomed to the porn they’ve already seen (See *Porn Addiction Escalates*), they typically have to constantly be moving on to more extreme forms of pornography to get aroused by it. [13] As a result, just like the rats, many porn users find themselves getting aroused by things that used to disgust them or that go against what they think is morally right. [14]

And once they start watching extreme and dangerous sex acts, these types of porn users are being taught that those behaviors are more normal and common than they are. [15] One study found that people exposed to significant

amounts of porn thought things like sex with animals and violent sex were twice as common as what those not exposed to porn thought. [16] And when people believe a behavior is normal, they're more likely to try it. [17]

Research has also found that watching degrading porn increases users' dominating and harassing behavior toward women, [18] and leaves the user feeling less compassion for rape victims. [19] Porn watchers are also more likely to express attitudes supporting violence against women [20]—which is especially scary since those who support sexual violence are more likely to commit that kind of violence in real life. [21] (See [Porn Leads to Violence](#))

Obviously not everyone who looks at porn is going to turn into a rapist; but the reality is that studies have shown that even casual pornography use has the power to start changing ideas and attitudes, [22] and changes to behavior often aren't far behind.

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WHY WATCHING PORN IS AN ESCALATING BEHAVIOR

Because of its addictive nature, in order to just feel some sense of normality, an individual usually needs an ever increasing dosage of porn. The material that they seek out also evolves. Overtime their appetite pushed them to more hardcore versions to achieve the same level of arousal.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Most users start on free porn, but it doesn't end there.*
- *You begin to need more extreme versions of pornography and more often to get the same effects.*
- *Turning to porn becomes the users preferred solution to stress.*

Have you ever wondered how pornographers that charge for their material stay in business when there's so much porn available for free? As Wendy Seltzer—an attorney and fellow at Yale Law School—explained, the answer is actually pretty simple: once porn users get hooked, they'll want more and more. "Seeing [free porn] just whets their appetite for more," Seltzer said. "Once they get through what's available for free, they'll move into the paid services." [1]

Fortunately for pornographers, that pattern isn't likely to change any time soon since the reason it happens is built into the brain.

Pornography researchers have found that users acclimate to the porn they watch—they get used to it, and it stops being exciting or arousing. Why? Because their brain's pleasure response has gotten numb. [2]

When a person is aroused by porn, their brain releases a chemical called dopamine that makes them feel pleasure. [3] As the dopamine goes through their brain, it leaves behind a pathway created by a protein called iFosB (pronounced delta fos b) [4] that connects feeling aroused to looking at porn. [5] Basically dopamine is saying "this feels good; let's remember how to get back here," and iFosB goes to work building a brain pathway to make it easier for the person to do that again. [6] When this happens with healthy behaviors it is a good thing, but when it happens with unhealthy ones it can lead to trouble.

The problem is, when a person consistently looks at porn, their brain is constantly being flooded with a high level of dopamine. A healthy brain isn't used to that, so the brain responds by getting rid of some of its dopamine receptors, which take in the dopamine that's released so that the brain knows it's there. [7] With fewer receptors, the user can't feel the dopamine's effects as much—and suddenly the porn that used to excite starts seeming boring. [8]

Many leading brain researchers now believe that once a porn user's brain starts cutting back on dopamine receptors, to get the same excitement and arousal they used to feel, many porn users need an even larger surge of dopamine; to get it, they have to look at more porn, look at porn more often, or look at more hardcore material. [9] You see, it's not just arousal that gets dopamine pumping. The brain also releases it when it sees something novel, shocking, or surprising. [10] That's why consistent porn users often find themselves looking for harder and harder images. [11] On top of that, because they've built up such a high tolerance to arousing material, to feel excited many users have to combine sexual arousal with the feeling of aggressive release. [12] That's why so much of hardcore porn is full of images of women being physically harmed. [13] It's also the reason that many porn addicts quickly find themselves looking at things that used to disgust them or that they used to see as morally wrong. [14]

On top of needing harder material, many porn addicts find themselves craving porn more and more often. [15] That's because while they're overloading their brain with dopamine, they're also building up higher levels of iFosB. [16] The more iFosB, the more the user's brain drives them to look at porn, even if they don't like the material they're looking at. [17]

As the addiction deepens, users not only become more impulsive, making it more likely that they'll give into their cravings, [18] but also whenever they encounter a stressful situation, they're more likely to feel like they don't have any way to deal with the stress other than by turning to porn's temporary distraction. [19]

And the more they turn back to their habit, the deeper the brain pathways that lead back to using become, making it harder and harder to break the cycle. [20]

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HOW PORN KILLS LOVE



In real life, real love requires a real person. Research has found that after men are exposed to pornography, they rate themselves as less in love with their partner than men who didn't see any porn. On top of that, another study found that after being exposed to pornographic images, people were more critical of their partner's appearance, sexual curiosity, sexual performance, and displays of affection.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Real love means real people.*
- *Porn makes real relationships more difficult and less satisfying.*
- *Porn can make you cynical about real love.*

Pornographers pretend that what they're selling is Love 2.0. It's like love, they say, but easier.

You see, in real life, real love requires a real person. And a real person has thoughts and ideas and talents. Maybe they're quirky and fun to be around; maybe they're a great listener and always take time to hear how you're feeling; or maybe they're awesome at karaoke and being with them gives you the courage to get on stage too. Every person is a unique mix, and it's that awesome blend that we fall in love with.

Of course, pornographers can't offer any of that, so instead they capitalize on the fact that the real people that real love requires come with some complications. In real life, there's a chance your partner will be having a bad day or a bad hair day. Maybe they're tired or under a deadline, so they don't have time to do exactly what you want. And they have needs of their own that need to be considered.

In porn, all of that can get edited out: any physical flaws can be quickly Photoshopped away [1]; no matter what's happening to them, the people on screen can be made to look like they're having a good time [2]; and no one seems to have any needs of their own, opinions, or feelings to consider [3]. Besides, if anyone fails to immediately satisfy, there's always someone new to click to [4].

Doesn't sound much like real life or real love does it? Here's the thing: not only is porn a fantasy, but it also makes it harder for users to have real loving relationships [5].

Why? Because just like many other multibillion dollar industries, pornographers feed viewers completely unrealistic expectations in order to keep customers coming back [6]. Real love isn't any more like what happens in porn than the average Marlboro smoker is like a 6' 9" cowboy. But it works out well for pornographers since the more porn a viewer watches, the more their real relationships don't seem exciting enough [7], which gives

them a reason to turn back to porn. And the more they watch porn, the more likely they are to be indoctrinated with porn's version of how relationships should go [8].

Since porn often portrays women as nothing more than sex objects that need to be dominated [9], it's not surprising that porn users often start seeing real women that way as well [10]. In one study of porn's effects, researchers broke participants up into three groups: to one they showed a high amount of pornography, one a medium amount, and the third a lower amount, and then followed with questions about what participants thought about women [11]. Results showed that the more porn a man was exposed to, the more likely he was to prefer that women be submissive and subordinate to men. Since most women in our culture are taught to expect love to be built on equality and mutual respect, seeing women as subordinate isn't exactly a great start to lasting love. [12]

For those lucky enough to have found a special someone, using porn can take things downhill fast. Research has found that after men are exposed to pornography, they rate themselves as less in love with their partner than men who didn't see any porn [13]. On top of that, another study found that after being exposed to pornographic images, people were more critical of their partner's appearance, sexual curiosity, sexual performance, and displays of affection [14].

Over time, those who consistently use porn often may even lose interest in finding love altogether. Frequent porn use is associated with feeling cynical about love in general, less trust in romantic partners, and with feeling like marriage is confining [15].

Porn doesn't do any favors for the user's partner, either. Since so much of men's porn is only about what the man wants while ignoring anything about what's good for a woman

or a relationship, wives and girlfriends often end up feeling like their partner doesn't really value them. [16] Many partners of porn users end up depressed, anxious, and feeling like they can never measure up. [17]

Of course, pornographers don't bother to mention any of this. Part of porn's fantasy is that a person can live in both worlds—that they can create a real, loving relationship, but also bring in thousands of other sexual partners as long as those partners are kept behind a computer screen. In reality, a porn habit can take a serious toll on a person's ability to offer someone real, unselfish, meaningful love [18]—which often means that in the end, they're left without much more than what's behind that computer screen. [19]

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WHY PORN IS FULL OF LIES



In porn, everything from the way people look to how and why they have sex is a lie. Porn users often get so obsessed with chasing something that isn't real that they miss out on actual relationships.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Porn is nothing but a production.*
- *Porn makes you miss out on the best parts of actual relationships.*
- *Porn is like sexual junk food.*

Back in the 1950s, two researchers, Dr. Nikolaas Tinbergen and Dr. D. Magnus, played a trick on butterflies. [1] After figuring out which marks on female butterfly wings were most eye-catching to their mates, they created their own cardboard butterflies and painted them to look like super-females. Their wing patterns were based on the wings of normal butterflies, but with more exciting marks than would ever be found in nature.

And the butterflies fell for it. Even though real female butterflies were around and available, the males kept trying to partner with the cardboard versions. It wasn't getting them what they wanted—which was the chance to mate—but they had been tricked, so they ignored the real females and kept trying to charm the decoys.

Any of this sound familiar?

In porn, everything from the way people look to how and why they have sex is no more real than Tinbergen's cardboard wings. And just like the butterflies that got duped, porn users often get so obsessed with chasing something that isn't real that they miss out on actual relationships.

Thanks to teams of plastic surgeons and some help from Photoshop, the women in porn don't offer anything close to a realistic picture of what women in real life look like—particularly since we all get older, but pornographic images never age. [2] As a result, people that are regularly exposed to porn are more likely than others to feel poorly about how they look. [3] And after looking at even softcore porn, users feel worse about how their partner looks. [4]

And the fiction is more than skin deep. In most porn, a person is only worth the sum of their body parts; [5] it doesn't matter whether they're funny or smart, kind or interesting. All they are is a tool for sex. It shouldn't be a big surprise then that when teens watch or see sexual media, both boys and girls have stronger notions of women being sex objects. [6]

Even sex itself gets completely warped. A typical 45 minute porn flick takes three days of filming to produce, but leaves the viewer with the impression that everything they just watched happened without a break. [7] Porn also makes it look like no matter what a man does, the woman he's with is thrilled, even though the majority of sexual acts

shown are degrading or violent. [8]

It can be tempting to think that porn is just one kind of sexual experience, not better or worse than any other sexual experience. After all, it can feel pretty similar. But our senses can be deceiving.

Let's say, for example, that you just got done with a 10 mile run on a hot day. You come inside and there are two glasses of water on the kitchen table. One is regular water from the tap; the other is salt water. Both look the same. Both are water. But while one glass will hydrate your body, the other will leave you more dehydrated than before. And over time, while regular water will keep you alive, drinking only salt water would kill you faster than if you drank nothing at all. [9]

It's the same with real relationships and porn. Why? Because porn is chock full of ideas and beliefs that are completely opposite of what real relationships, real sex, and real love are like. Healthy relationships are built on equality, honesty, respect, and love. But in porn, it's the reverse; interactions are based on domination, disrespect, abuse, violence, and detachment. [10]

Even the experience of using porn is the opposite of what real romantic relationships are like. A real romantic relationship is about being with a person and falling in love with them; it's about emotional connection and trust. In real relationships you can feel a person there, you can smell them and hear them laugh. The physical pleasure of sex is connected to sharing a whole relationship. With porn, however, sex is about being alone, watching other people do things. It's about constantly searching for something new, constantly being shocked and surprised. [11]

The more a person buys into the porn experience and its ideas, the harder it will be for them to have a real loving relationship (See *Porn Kills Love*)—or even a real sex life (See *Porn Ruins Your Sex Life*).

Just like the butterflies learned, porn is not only deceiving, but it can also keep us from having the real relationships porn is trying to imitate (See *Porn Kills Love*). Turns out dating a piece of cardboard isn't all that great.

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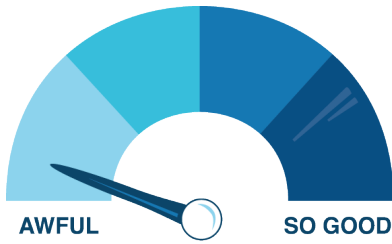
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HOW PORN DAMAGES YOUR SEX LIFE



Porn often leads to less sex and less satisfying sex. And for many users, porn can eventually mean no sex at all.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Porn leads to less sex and less satisfying sex.*
- *Extended porn use can cause ED for men even in their 20s.*

Porn promises a virtual world filled with sex—more sex, better sex. What it doesn't mention, however, is that the further a user goes into that fantasy world, the more likely their reality is to become just the opposite. [1] Porn often leads to less sex and less satisfying sex. [2] And for many users, porn eventually means no sex at all. [3]

It doesn't take much porn for things to start heading downhill. In one of the most comprehensive studies on porn use ever conducted, researchers found that after being exposed to softcore sexual material, both men and women were significantly less happy with their partner's looks, willingness to try new sex acts, and sexual performance. [4] Even being exposed to porn just once can make people feel less in love with their significant other. [5]

Why? Because when a person is watching porn, the sexual roadmaps in their brain are being redrawn. [6] When a person has a sexual experience that feels good, their brain creates a map to get them back there (See *Porn Changes the Brain*). And since our brains like novelty, brain maps that lead to something new and exciting are rewarded with an extra dose of brain chemicals that make us feel good while strengthening those brain pathways. [7]

Here's the catch: our brain maps are either use it or lose it. [8] Just like a hiking trail will start to grow over if it's not getting walked on, brain pathways that don't get traffic start to get weaker. So when a person starts looking at porn, they first create and then strengthen brain pathways linking feeling aroused with images of porn. [9] Meanwhile the pathways connecting arousal with things like seeing, touching, or cuddling with their partner aren't getting used. Pretty soon, natural turn-ons aren't enough, and many porn users find they can't get aroused by anything but porn. [10]

For teens, it gets even scarier. Many teens never have the chance to learn what a healthy relationship is like before porn starts teaching them its version—which is typically filled with violence, domination, infidelity, and abuse. [11] Since most people aren't too excited about the idea of being in an abusive relationship, teens that have gotten their

sex ed from porn often find that they struggle to connect with real romantic partners and that they don't know how to be turned on by anything other than images on a screen. [12] As biologist Gary Wilson said, "Using porn is more than just training for the wrong sport. It's replacing these guys' ability to play the sport they really want to learn." [13]

Beliefs and feelings aren't the only things that change, either. For a skyrocketing number of male porn users, it becomes blindingly clear that there's a problem when they realize they can no longer have real sex at all. [14]

Thirty years ago, when a man developed erectile dysfunction (ED), it was almost always because he was getting older, usually past 40, and as his body aged, his blood vessels would get blocked, making it harder to maintain an erection. Chronic ED in anyone under 35 was nearly unheard of. [15]

But those were the days before Internet porn. These days, online message boards are flooded with complaints from porn users in their teens and 20s complaining that they can't maintain an erection. [16] But for this kind of ED, the problem isn't in the penis—it's in the brain. [17]

Erections are powered by chemicals in the brain's reward center (See *Porn Is Like a Drug*) that are released when a guy sees, hears, smells, or feels something that turns him on. [18] The problem for porn users is that they've hijacked their reward center by using porn to get it to overload on these chemicals. [19] As a result, the user's brain responds by cutting down on the amount of pleasure chemicals it produces and stops responding as well to the chemicals that are being released. [20] It's like when you're standing next to a fire alarm that goes off; it's too much noise so you cover your ears. That's what porn user's brains are doing. When chemical levels are too high, the brain fights back by blocking some of the flood of chemicals released.

On top of that, porn users have wired their brain to get aroused by sitting alone in a room

looking at virtual images rather than connecting arousal to being with a real person. [21]

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Due to their lowered sexual response and altered brain pathways, many porn users find they just can't get excited enough to maintain an erection without porn; and for many users, over time, even porn isn't enough. [22]

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HOW PORN CAN HURT YOUR PARTNER

Several studies have found that partners of porn users often report feeling loss, betrayal, mistrust, devastation, and anger when they learn that the other half of their committed relationship has been using porn. Many show physical symptoms of anxiety and depression.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Porn increases negative feelings in relationships.*
- *No serious research has proven that porn improves relationships.*
- *Porn makes women feel like they are never enough.*

Here's an inconvenient truth: While porn is something users can choose to do on their own, that use doesn't just affect them—it affects their partner too, and not for the better. Two of the most respected pornography researchers, professors Jennings Bryant and Dolf Zillman at the University of Alabama, who have studied the effects of porn and media for more than 30 years, said that when it comes to porn use “no rigorous research demonstrations of desirable effects can be reported.” [1] In other words, in all the serious research that's been done on porn, no one has found that it has any benefits. What several studies have found, however, is that porn use can cause serious damage not only to the user, but also to those closest to them—especially their partner. [2]

Studies have shown that even casual use of porn can cause the user to feel less attracted to their partner. [3] And when a person frequently uses pornography, they're far more likely to feel less satisfied with their partner's looks, sexual performance, and willingness to try new sexual acts. [4]

Why all the sudden disappointment with one's partner? It's likely due to the fact that porn promotes a completely fictional version of how people look and behave (See *Porn Is a Lie*), and makes it look like an exciting reality—one that their partners often feel they can never live up to. [5]

Given that the women depicted in porn are surgically enhanced, air-brushed, and Photoshopped, [6] it's not hard to see why, according to a national poll, only one in seven women doesn't think that porn has raised men's expectations of how women should look. [7]

And it's not only looks that are being depicted with unrealistic standards. In most porn, sex is all about men; [8] women are depicted as being happy with whatever a man wants to do, even if it's dangerous, painful, or humiliating. [9] A study of the most popular porn videos found that nine scenes out of 10 showed women being verbally or physically abused, yet the female victims almost always

responded with either pleasure or appeared to be neutral. [10] In even the most mainstream porn, the sex acts shown are overwhelmingly degrading toward women, and are usually geared toward enhancing men's pleasure. [11] As a result, male porn users' ideas of what sex should be are often warped [12] and their partners often report that they are asked to act out porn scripts or do things they're not comfortable with or find demeaning. [13]

In interviews with college-age women, feminist writer Niomi Wolf has found that in sexual relationships, women frequently feel that “they can never measure up, that they can never ask for what they want.” [14]

And the emotional pain can run much deeper than having a bad time in bed. Since women in our culture typically expect their intimate relationships to be built on trust, respect, honesty, and love, when a woman learns that her partner is using porn—which typically glorifies the opposite: disrespect, abuse, aggression, and infidelity—it can not only damage the trust she has in her partner, but also shake the foundation of everything she believed about her relationship. [15]

That pain can have very serious consequences. Several studies have found that women often report feeling loss, betrayal, mistrust, devastation, and anger when they learn that their partner in a committed relationship has been using porn. [16] Many women show physical symptoms of anxiety and depression. Some show signs of PTSD, and some even become suicidal. [17]

To make matters worse, the majority of women who learn of a partner's pornography use isolate themselves at least somewhat from their normal sources of social support, just when they need those support networks most. [18] In many cases, women fear telling anyone at all, either because they're embarrassed about it or

they're afraid of being blamed for their partner's problem. [19]

For many partners, the blame can even come from themselves. One study of women in relationships with porn addicts found that while the women often felt their partner was uncaring or selfish, they also worried that somehow the problem was their fault. [20] And for many of the women, their partner's porn use made them feel like the entire relationship was a complete farce. [21]

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WHY PORN LEAVES YOU LONELY

The more pornography a person consumes the harder it becomes for them to be aroused by a real person or a real relationship. As a result, many users start feeling like something's wrong with them; they don't know how to be turned on by a real person, much less form a deep personal connection with one.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Porn lessens your ability to connect in real relationships.
- People are often secretive about their porn use, separating them further from others.
- Porn can contribute to or increase other psychological problems in users.

From a business perspective, the porn industry has a pretty clever racket going. Their product offers users temporary relief from anxiety, depression, and loneliness in exchange for making these same problems much worse in the long-term. [1] That works out really well for pornographers, since the worse their customers' anxiety and isolation grow, the more reason they have to turn back to porn. But for the user, the end result isn't nearly so nice.

"Any time [a person] spends much time with the usual pornography usage cycle, it can't help but be a depressing, demeaning, self-loathing kind of experience," says Dr. Gary Brooks, a psychologist who has worked with porn addicts for the last 30 years. [2]

The more pornography a person consumes, the more their brain connects being aroused with porn's fictional fantasy (See Porn Changes the Brain)[3]—and the harder it becomes for them to be aroused by a real person or a real relationship (See Porn Ruins Your Sex Life). [4]

As a result, many users start feeling like something's wrong with them; they don't know how to be turned on by a real person, much less form a deep personal connection with one. [5]

Niomi Wolf, an author and political activist, has traveled all over the country to talk with college students about relationships. "When I ask about loneliness, a deep, sad silence descends on audiences of young men and young women alike," she says. "They know they are lonely together ... and that [porn] is a big part of that loneliness. What they don't know is how to get out." [6]

Studies have found that when people engage in an ongoing pattern of "self-concealment,"—which is when they do things they're not proud of and keep them a secret from their friends and family members—it not only hurts their relationships and leaves them feeling lonely, but also makes

them more vulnerable to severe psychological problems. [7] For both male and female porn users, their habit is often accompanied by problems with anxiety, body-image issues, poor self-image, relationship problems, insecurity, and depression. [8]

Porn teaches that both men and women aren't worth anything more than the sum of their body parts and how much sexual pleasure they can offer. [9] Whether porn users like it or not, those perceptions often start creeping into how they see themselves and other people in real life. [10] The harder it becomes for the user to see themselves and others as anything more than sexual objects, the harder it is to develop real relationships. [11]

"There's a certain way of experiencing sexual arousal that is the opposite of closeness," Brooks said. "At best, it can be managed somewhat by some people, but most of the time it creates a barrier that poisons relationships." [12]

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THE PORN INDUSTRY'S DARK SECRETS

To viewers, pornography can appear a fantasy world of pleasure and thrills. To those who create and participate in making pornography, however, their experiences are often flooded with drugs, disease, rape and abuse.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *The porn industry is plagued with drugs, violence, and rape.*
- *Many victims of sex trafficking are used to film pornography.*

“I got the &*%\$ kicked out of me Most of the girls start crying because they’re hurting so bad I couldn’t breathe. I was being hit and choked. I was really upset and they didn’t stop. They kept filming. [I asked them to turn the camera off] and they kept going.” –Regan Starr [1]

The pornography industry works hard to keep up a glamorous image, but behind the camera is a reality of violence, drugs, and human trafficking.

With some editing and off-screen coercion, pornographers can make it look like what’s happening onscreen is being enjoyed. But the un-cut version is a different story. Porn actors are constantly threatened and emotionally and verbally abused by agents and directors to force them into doing things they don’t want to do. [2]

“You’re viewed as an object and not as a human with a spirit,” wrote Jersey Jaxin, a former porn star that left the industry in 2007. “People do drugs because they can’t deal with the way they are being treated. Seventy five percent [of porn performers] and rising are using drugs. Have to numb themselves. There are specific doctors in this industry that if you go in for a common cold they’ll give you Vicodin, Viagra, anything you want because all they care about is the money. You are a number. You’re bruised. You have black eyes. You’re ripped. You’re torn. You have your insides coming out.” [3]

Not only do pornographers crop out the severe physical and emotional pain actors experience, but in many cases they also hide the fact that some “performers” aren’t given any choice at all.

Part of the lie porn producers want customers to buy into is that porn is legitimate entertainment made by glamorous people who are doing it because it’s what they want; it’s OK for the user to enjoy it because the people they’re watching seem to be enjoying it. What they don’t say is that some of those people look like they’re having a good time because behind the scenes they have a gun pointed at their head. And if they stop smiling, it will go off. [4]

Obviously, human trafficking is an underground business, making firm statistics hard to come by. But the facts in cases that come to light are chilling. For example, in 2011, two Miami men were found guilty of spending five years luring women into a human trafficking trap. They would advertise modeling roles, then when women came to try out, they would drug them, kidnap them, rape them, videotape the violence, and sell it to pornography stores and businesses across the country. [5]

That same year a couple in Missouri was charged with forcing a mentally handicapped girl to produce porn for them by beating, whipping, suffocating, electrocuting, drowning, mutilating, and choking her until she agreed. One of the photos they forced her to make ended up on the front cover of a porn publication owned by Hustler Magazine Group. [6]

Those cases are just the tip of the iceberg; many more like them exist, and for each victim discovered, countless others suffer in silence. [7]

Still others are victimized by being forced into prostitution.

Given that pornography makes prostitution and sexually exploiting others look normal, [8] it’s not surprising that there’s a strong association between pornography use and going to prostitutes. [9] In fact, men who go to prostitutes are twice as likely to have watched a porn film in the last year compared to the general population. [10] It’s also not surprising that when these customers show up, many come ready with porn images in hand to show the women they’re exploiting—many of which are human trafficking victims controlled by pimps—what they’ll be forced to do. [11]

And they’re not the only ones using porn as an illustration. “Pimps and traffickers use pornography to initiate their ... victims into their new life of sexual slavery,” says Dr. Janice

Shaw Crouse, a former UN representative and a senior fellow at the Beverley LaHaye Institute. Through exposure to porn, these victims “get hardened to accept the inevitable and learn what is expected of them.” [12]

In a study of 854 women in prostitution across nine countries, 49% said that porn had been made of them while they were in prostitution, and 47% said they had been harmed by men who had either forced or tried to force their victims to do things the men had seen in porn. [13]

In the end, porn fuels prostitution; and porn and prostitution are the products the sex trade exists to deliver. [14]

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HOW WATCHING PORN CAN LEAD TO VIOLENCE

A few years ago, a team of researchers looked at the most popular porn films and they randomly picked 50 and analyzed them. Of the 304 scenes the movies contained, 88% contained physical violence. On top of that, 49% contained verbal aggression.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Most mainstream porn contains violent sexual behavior against women.*
- *Watching violent porn changes attitudes and leads viewers to think violent sex is normal.*
- *Studies show that after viewing porn, even non-violent, men's attitudes toward women change.*

It's no secret that some porn is violent, but most people think that's something different from mainstream pornography—something out on the fringe. Not all porn is the same, its defenders say. People can choose what they like, and if they're into violent stuff, that's their business, right?

It's true that not all porn is the same, but the reality is that the majority of even the most mainstream porn is packed full of women being physically and verbally abused—and watching it takes a serious toll on the user.

A few years ago, a team of researchers looked at the most popular porn films—the ones bought and rented most often. [1] From that group, they randomly picked 50 and analyzed them. Of the 304 scenes the movies contained, 88% contained physical violence. On top of that, 49% contained verbal aggression. In total, only one scene in 10 didn't contain any aggression, and the typical scene averaged 12 physical or verbal attacks. One action-packed scene managed to fit in 128.

Unlike violence in regular movies where someone gets punched, gets mad, and fights back, 95% of the victims of aggression in the porn scenes either were neutral or responded with pleasure. And while the targets were women 94% of the time, when a man was the victim, he was four times more likely than his female costars to be upset at his attacker.

In other words, in porn, women are getting beat up and they're smiling about it.

For porn users, even those that manage to avoid violent material, it's difficult not to be influenced. Study after study has found that watching even non-violent porn is correlated with the user being more likely to use verbal coercion, drugs, and alcohol to push women into sex. [2] And those who consistently look at non-violent porn are more likely to support statements that promote abuse and sexual aggression of both women and girls. [3] Much of even non-violent porn portrays a

power difference between partners where men are in charge and women are submissive and obedient. Viewing this type of dehumanizing submission makes dominance seem normal and can set the stage for eventual acceptance of verbal and physical aggression. [4]

And the changes don't always stop with the user's attitude. An analysis of 33 different studies found that exposure to both non-violent and violent porn increases aggressive behavior, including both having violent fantasies and actually committing violent assaults. [5]

Not surprisingly, the more violent the porn, the more likely the user is to support and act out violence. [6]

If you're wondering how sitting in a chair watching porn can actually change what a person thinks and does, the answer goes back to how porn changes the brain (See *Porn Changes the Brain*). Our brains have what scientists call "mirror neurons"—brain cells that fire not only when we do things ourselves, but also when we watch other people do things. [7] This is why movies can make us cry or get scared; or why some people can get so emotionally involved in watching a football game on TV. When a person is watching porn, their brain is busy wiring together whatever is happening on the screen to sexual arousal—in many ways just like if a person was actually doing what they are watching. [8] So if they're watching a woman get kicked around and called names while feeling aroused, they're more likely to associate that kind of violence with being sexy. [9] Even when porn isn't violent, viewers are learning to see other people as nothing more than objects made to be used for sexual pleasure. [10]

To make matters worse, when porn shows the victims of violence accepting or enjoying being hurt, the person watching is learning that people want and like to be treated that way,

giving viewers added permission to act that way themselves. [11]

That education leads to behavior changes that range from being more likely to verbally harass women, [12] to problems as serious as rape. The scary truth is that both non-violent and violent porn make users more likely to support violence against women and to believe that women enjoy being raped, [13] and those beliefs have been found across several research studies to be predictive of a person being sexually aggressive in real life. [14] With violent and rape porn, the associations get particularly strong. [15] In fact, one study found that those who reported higher past exposure to violent porn were six times more likely to report having raped someone than those that had low past exposure. [16]

Of course, not every porn watcher is going to turn into a rapist, but that doesn't mean pornography use isn't still associated with a wave of violence on a massive scale. The vast majority of the porn viewed by millions of people every day is teaching that humiliation and violence are a normal part of what sex is supposed to be [17]—and that education is changing what happens in bedrooms around the world. [18] It's making it harder for many men to feel aroused unless they can do the things they've seen in porn [19], and it's leaving women feeling like they can't express the pain it's causing them. [20] And the more porn teaches us that aggression is a part of sex, the more that violence is being made invisible. [21]

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HOW PORN WARPS IDEAS ABOUT SEX

Whether they want to or not, the majority of teens are getting some of their sex ed from porn. Researchers have repeatedly found that people who have seen a significant amount of porn are more likely to start having sex sooner and with more partners, and to engage in riskier kinds of sex, putting them at greater risk of getting sexually transmitted infections.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Porn has become a fictional version of sexual education for most young people.*
- *The porn industry has become more extreme*
- *Sexual preferences of porn viewers have become heavily influenced by pornography.*
- *Porn edits out the consequences of unhealthy sex practices.*

Can you imagine what would happen if your school's health class was taught by a cigarette salesman? Chances are, you wouldn't hear much about lung cancer or how much shorter the typical smoker's life span is. He might even try to tell you that smoking could boost your sprint time. Sounds ridiculous, right? Here's the problem: that's the kind of education millions of teens are getting about sex every day.

While porn is often called "adult material," many of its viewers are well under the legal age. Whether they want to or not, the majority of teens are getting some of their sex ed from porn. [1] And just like cigarette commercials show healthy people puffing away instead of the cancer-causing reality, porn is offering a completely warped idea of what partners, sex, and relationships are really like. [2]

In porn, sex with strangers is made to look normal [3]—and more often than not, it's more than one stranger at a time. In a study of popular porn videos, the number of sexual partners in a scene ranged from one to 19, and averaged at three. And the kinds of sexual acts pornographers get on film are often degrading, dangerous, or violent. [4]

"A competitive market means that pornographers are trying to outdo each other to come up with the most extreme images," wrote John Wood, a therapist who works with youth addicted to pornography, in an article talking about porn's effects. "This contest to push the boundaries means that straight intercourse is considered too boring. Images of brutal anal sex and women being humiliated and degraded by two or more men at any one time are the new norms." [5]

As a result, studies show that people who view porn are far more likely to think things like group sex or dangerous sex acts are more common than their non-porn-watching peers. [6]

And in many cases, attitudes make their way into behavior. Researchers have repeatedly found that people who have seen a significant amount of porn

are more likely to start having sex sooner and with more partners, and to engage in riskier kinds of sex, putting them at greater risk of getting sexually transmitted infections. [7]

Sociologist Michael Kimmel has found that men's sexual fantasies have become heavily influenced by porn, [8] which gets awfully tricky when their partners don't want to act out the degrading or dangerous acts porn shows. [9] As a result, men who look at pornography have been shown to be more likely to go to prostitutes, [10] often looking for a chance to live out what they've seen in porn. [11] In one survey of former prostitutes, 80% said that customers had shown them images of porn to illustrate what they wanted to do. [12]

What pornography doesn't show is what healthy sex is like, since most pornographers cut out things like kissing, cuddling, other positive kinds of affection, and partners being responsive to each other's needs and preferences. [13]

They also cut out the consequences of the kinds of sex shown. [14] In porn, no one contracts sexually transmitted infections; there are no unwanted pregnancies, no cervical cancer, no intestinal parasites, and no skin tearing or bruises. And no matter how rough a person treats their partner, in porn, nearly everything looks like it feels good. [15]

In fact, in the study of popular porn videos, in nine scenes out of 10, a woman was being hit, beaten, yelled at, or otherwise harmed, and the result was almost always the same—the victim either seemed not to mind or looked happy about it. [16]

Not only does porn offer up a fictional version of sex education, but also that education is being delivered in a way perfectly tailored to how our brains learn. [17] Images are an especially powerful teacher, since they can pack

in a whole lot of information that the viewer can understand very quickly. And while words are often interpreted as opinions, our brains are more likely to interpret images as facts; after all, it's a lot harder to argue with something you're seeing happen in front of you. [18]

Our brains also learn better when they're sexually aroused. [19] When you add in the focused concentration of searching through pornographic images to find exactly what the user is looking for, and reinforcing what's being taught with the reward of sexual climax, it creates the perfect conditions for wiring what porn teaches into the brain (See *Porn Changes the Brain*). [20]

As a result, consistent porn users wire their sexuality to looking at virtual images of unrealistic, surgically altered bodies. [21] Instead of learning to build relationships with real people, it often feels more natural and arousing to them to be alone in front of a computer. [22] "It's sad," said Dr. Gary Brooks, a psychology professor who studies porn's effect on men. "Boys who are initiated in sex through these images become indoctrinated in a way that can potentially stay with them for the rest of their lives." [23]

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HOW PORN CAN HARM FAMILIES

Research has found that marriages in which one person has a porn problem or sexual compulsion are often plagued by less intimacy and sensitivity, as well as more anxiety, secrecy, isolation, and dysfunction in the relationship. And since many porn users end up losing their jobs as a result of looking at porn on a company computer, these marriages often end up with less financial security as well.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Marriages with porn problems have less intimacy and sensitivity.*
- *Porn use increases the likelihood of infidelity.*
- *Children of porn users experience less parental involvement.*

Life as a pro basketball player looks pretty good. The pay is great, you'd get to wear shorts to work, and your professional goals would include things like dunking more. So let's say you decided to make that your plan: become a professional ball player by age 21. Chances are, you wouldn't start preparing by picking up a cigarette habit and switching to a donuts-only diet.

So what does aiming for the NBA have to do with porn? The point is, most of us have an idea of what we want to do in life, and for the majority of people, that plan involves having a family. In fact, more than 80 percent of young adults say that getting married is an important priority in their life plan. [1] And considering married people are far more likely to say they are "highly satisfied" with their lives, it's probably not such a bad goal. [2] The problem for porn users is that healthy marriages and porn don't mix well.

Research has found that marriages in which one person has a porn problem or sexual compulsion are often plagued by less intimacy and sensitivity, as well as more anxiety, secrecy, isolation, and dysfunction in the relationship. [3] And since many porn users end up losing their jobs as a result of looking at porn on a company computer, these marriages can end up with less financial security as well. [4]

In fact, many women—regardless of what their religious beliefs are—see looking at porn as a serious threat to being able to stay married at all. [5] Why? For one thing, when a partner is using porn often, it takes away time they could otherwise be spending together. [6] On top of that, many partners consider it cheating—or close to cheating—when their partner is using images of someone else's body to get aroused. [7]

And virtual cheating isn't the only thing user's spouses have to worry about. Studies have found that married porn users are more likely than non-users to have sex with someone other than their spouse, [8] and men who look at porn are

also more likely to go to prostitutes. [9] As one researcher said, "Men witness the abuse of women in pornography constantly, and if they can't engage in that behavior with their wives, girlfriends, or children, they force a [prostitute] to do it." [10]

And even if a user never goes that far, people who look at pornography are also more likely to be more sexually permissive—such as being OK with having lots of sexual partners and dangerous kinds of sex—which is associated with having less stable marriages later in life. [11]

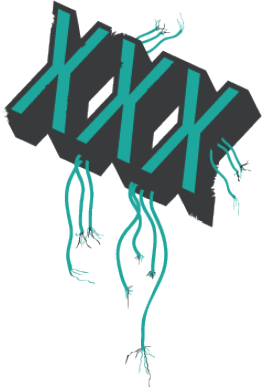
As a result, divorces related to porn use have "exploded," says Dr. Gary Brooks, a psychologist who has been working with porn addicts for 30 years. [12] In a survey of members of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers taken in 2002, 62 percent of the divorce attorneys surveyed said that obsession with porn had been a significant factor in divorces cases they had handled in the last year. [13]

Whether or not a porn user's marriage falls apart, their spouse isn't the only one affected. Children are often victims, too, either by being directly exposed to pornographic images or by being neglected by a parent who uses the time they could be spending with their kids to instead sit alone in front of their computer. [14] In a 2004 poll conducted by Elle magazine and MSNBC.com, one in five of the male respondents confessed that porn was taking away hours that used to be spent with their partner or kids. Among users that spent five or more hours per week looking at porn, that number shot up to 37 percent. [15]

Not everyone will or even wants to make it to the NBA, but most people want to be happy (See *Porn Leaves You Lonely*) and to have a happy family as well. And the more we learn about porn and its effects, the clearer it becomes that a porn habit makes both of those goals harder and harder to reach.

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PORN'S HARM IS CHANGING FAST

Skeptics of pornography's danger will often point out that porn has been around for a long time. After all, cavemen drew sexual images on their stone walls, and the ancient Greeks painted it on their pottery. But comparing ancient paintings on clay vases to today's endless stream of live action videos depicting every possible sexual act, available 24 hours a day on a device that fits into your pocket isn't exactly comparing apples to apples.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Pornography has changed with technology.*
- *Porn has become more intense, violent, degrading, and humiliating over time.*
- *People are being exposed at younger and younger ages.*

Skeptics of pornography's danger will often point out that porn has been around for a long time. After all, cavemen drew sexual images on their stone walls, and the ancient Greeks painted it on their pottery. It's nothing new. [1]

But comparing ancient paintings on clay vases to today's endless stream of live action videos depicting every possible sexual act, available 24 hours a day on a device that fits into your pocket isn't exactly comparing apples to apples. Today's pornified culture is something very new. It's something the world has never seen.

So what changed? Like most large cultural shifts, nothing happened overnight, but some wheels were already turning back in 1953, the year Hugh Hefner published the first copy of *Playboy*.

Sex had become a more prominent part of American's cultural conversation due in part to Dr. Alfred Kinsey, who five years earlier had published a controversial but extremely popular book on sexuality. [2] He was heralded as one of the first scientists and writers to talk so openly about sexuality. [3] As a result, his books went flying off the shelves. [4]

Hefner capitalized on the trend with his magazine. However, to maximize sales, he had to change porn's image; instead of being thought of as something your friend's creepy uncle might have, porn needed to look mainstream. To do that, Hefner put pornographic photos next to essays and articles written by respected authors. In *Playboy*, porn looked like a gentleman's pursuit.

The next big shift happened in the 1980s, when VCRs made it possible for people to watch movies at home. [5] For porn users, that meant that instead of having to go to seedy movie theaters on the wrong side of town, all they had to do was go to the back room at their local movie rental place. Sure, they still had to go out to find it, but porn was suddenly a lot more accessible.

And then the Internet changed everything. [6]

Once porn hit the Web, suddenly there was nothing but a few keystrokes between anyone with an Internet connection and the most graphic material available, [7] and the online porn industry exploded. Between 1998 and 2007, the number of pornographic websites grew by 1,800%. [8] According to a 2004 study of Internet traffic in May of that year, porn sites were visited three times more often than Google, Yahoo!, and MSN Search combined. [9]

And porn hasn't stayed behind the computer screen. Now that porn is more available, affordable, and anonymous than ever before, more people are becoming addicted [10] and its influence has soaked into every aspect of our lives. [11] Popular video games feature full nudity. [12] Snowboards marketed to teens are plastered with images of porn stars. [13] Even children's toys have become more sexualized. [14]

Television shows and movies have been impacted too as producers and writers have upped the ante with more and more graphic content to keep the attention of audiences accustomed to porn. [15] Between 1998 and 2005, the number of sex scenes on American TV shows nearly doubled. [16] And it's not just happening on adult programs. In a study conducted in 2004 and 2005, 70% of the 20 TV shows most often watched by teens included sexual content and nearly half showed sexual behavior. [17]

And the more our society becomes sexually saturated, the more porn makers pump out harder and harder material to make sure they stay on the cutting edge. [18]

"Thirty years ago 'hardcore' pornography usually meant the explicit depiction of sexual intercourse," wrote Dr. Norman Doidge, in his

recent book on neuroscience, *The Brain That Changes Itself*. “Now hardcore has evolved and is increasingly dominated by the sadomasochistic themes ... all involving scripts fusing sex with hatred and humiliation. Hardcore pornography now explores the world of perversion, while softcore is now what hardcore was a few decades ago The comparatively tame softcore pictures of yesteryear ... now show up on mainstream media all day long, in the pornification of everything, including television, rock videos, soap operas, advertisements, and so on.” [19]

And not only is there more porn to watch, but also there are more ways than ever to watch it. [20] Today, not only do we have high-speed Internet, we’ve got it on tap for devices we have with us 24 hours a day. Families have gone from having one shared computer to often having multiple personal laptops, smartphones, and tablets. With the launch of Google Glass, it’s now possible to have an Internet-enabled screen in front of our eyes nearly every minute of the day.

As porn’s availability has risen, so have its devastating effects on people (See *Porn Is Like a Drug*), relationships (See *Porn Kills Love*), and society (See *Porn Leads to Violence & Porn’s Dirty Little Secret*) at large. [21] As therapist John Woods recently wrote, pornography addiction “is no longer just a private problem. It is a public health problem.” [22]

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