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# NET SAFETY RESOURCES

## CYBER LUST AND THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF PORN

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Justin VanAntwerp was pastor of First Baptist Church in Lawton, Michigan, until his conscience compelled him to stop preaching the gospel and admit he was viewing inappropriate Internet material several times a day. “I became really good at lying and covering up my tracks. I never once got caught, but on the inside I knew it wasn’t right.” VanAntwerp’s battle with online pornography ultimately cost him his job and his marriage. He resigned his position and confessed his sin to his wife—only to have her leave “almost immediately.”<sup>1</sup>

Craig Gross, pastor of an online anti-porn ministry called XXXChurch.com, said he hears stories like VanAntwerp’s all too often. He defines porn as “any sexually explicit writing and/or picture intended to arouse sexual desire.” He believes the problems are getting worse. “I think we’ll continue to see pastors lose jobs and lose marriages,” said the California native, who now lives in Grand Rapids Township, Michigan. “One of the things we always say is that porn will get you to do things you never thought you’d do.”<sup>2</sup>

Most Americans now call it “adult entertainment.” Why? Sadly, our society has bought the propaganda that the word pornography is just too judgmental and old-fashioned. As long as the viewer and person(s) being viewed are consenting adults (18 or over), sexual innuendos and naked bodies are considered normal and even an expectation of being entertained. Movies that should be given a “PG” rating based upon the plot are given unneeded scenes to “liven up” the appeal. The same terminology is used in cyberspace.

But a little research on the phrase “adult entertainment” reveals surprising facts. The porn industry invented those words in the 1990s. They have succeeded in convincing much of the western world that viewing porn should be a normal part of life. Yes, to a large extent, America has bought into the lies that the porn industry has spun our way.



Michael Leahy, Executive Director of Bravehearts, LLC, tours major university campuses around the nation and speaks out about our “Porn Nation,” uncovering the many hidden dangers of Internet porn, cybersex, chat rooms, online dating, and the long-term consequences of exposure to pornography. The Bravehearts website has this message for college students:

In our quest for sexual freedom, we discover that everyone and everything around us wants to tell us what is normal, including a sex-saturated media that's been bombarding us with over 14,000 sexual images and messages every year. Suddenly, we learn that for everything WE once considered to be taboo, there's someone or a group of people who consider it the norm. And we start to wonder, “What is normal?”<sup>3</sup>

The implication that feeding earthly lusts is a benign or even a helpful act is flat out wrong when considered from a scientific or religious perspective. One medical doctor said it this way: “Pornography is not a victimless crime. The users and the subjects are both devastated and the societal cost is immense.”<sup>4</sup> Pornography destroys wholesome relationships and can lead to depression, eating disorders, body image disorders, post traumatic stress, low self-esteem, sexual dysfunction, rape, incest, sexual harassment, domestic violence, divorce, teen pregnancy, illegitimacy, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Experts who regularly deal with the horrible consequences of pornography describe how online porn changes belief systems. Dr. Mary Anne Layden, a psychotherapist who specializes in sexual violence victims, sexual violence perpetrators, and sexual addiction, told United States Senators that in her 14 years of practice she has not treated one case of sexual violence that did not involve pornography. Under oath, she backed up her assertions with these details:

In one study examining pornographic distortion, college undergraduates were shown five hours of videos over a six week period which were either all pornographic, or half were pornographic or none were pornographic. The more pornography they saw the more their beliefs changed. The all-pornography group began to think that pornography was not offensive, that rapists deserved milder punishments, that women's liberation was not a good idea; they became more callous toward women and believed that a sizable percentage of the population engaged in group sex, sex with violence and sex with animals. Five hours of pornographic videos produced a belief in these 18 year-old subjects that 24 million Americans are having sex with Fido [...] Only 37% of that group thought pornography needed to be restricted as compared to 83% of the no-pornography group.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Layden concluded her testimony with this unforgettable line, “We are not just talking about an epidemic; we are talking about a sexual holocaust. You can protect them (children) now or you send them to me for treatment later.”<sup>6</sup>



While this topic may be uncomfortable for Christians, we can be confident that God's Word concerning our bodies is what's best for both individuals and society. The apostle Paul said, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."<sup>7</sup>

## Cyber Lust – Many Forms

Intriguing novels, action movies, health magazines, non-fiction books, and even TV ads for medication, take advantage of the truism: "sex sells." Some even claim it's virtually the only thing on the minds of all males that are older than ten.

Christians are commanded to watch out for false prophets. We can be such gullible people who don't recognize "wolves in sheep's clothing"<sup>8</sup> until it's too late. It is so easy to let our guards down and improperly discern good fruit from the bad. We live in dangerous times, and each of us is vulnerable to fall to online deception.

Jesus said, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."<sup>9</sup> Yes, there are "e-wolves." Christ's words are especially relevant in cyberspace, where expert marketers are perfecting their targeted messages which can be reused thousands of times based upon the demographics of an audience.

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In just the past 15 years, the Internet has enabled an alarming increase in porn distribution. The appeal of anonymous online access and the removal of any stigma from purchasing x-rated magazines at stores is propelling an explosion of new porn. Gone are the days described in which it was difficult to access this material.

Consider the difference between life today and the 1970s portrayal of the Herdman kids from the classic story, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*:

I thought Imogene probably wanted to get one of the dirty books out of the basement, which is where they keep them, but I knew nobody would let her do that. There is a big chain across the stairs to the basement and Miss Graebner, the librarian, can hear it rattle no matter where she is in the library, so you don't stand a chance of getting down there.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to realize that cyber lust covers more than just pornographic pictures or writing. Inappropriate relationships can start with flirting in an e-mail account. Other times, people use instant messaging or their MySpace pages or dating website profiles to tempt others into sin. Oftentimes short, clever innuendos are used by



marketers to lure the unsuspecting to read the stories of people “just like me,” which gradually lower inhibitions or prompt additional actions.

Tragically, consuming porn often leads to additional sins such as lying, cheating, stealing, or other immoral behaviors. As in the case of Justin VanAntwerp, families are torn apart, reputations are ruined, and ministry careers are ended. At a very basic level, the “special relationship” and God-given trust and mutual respect in marriage is thrown away for momentary pleasures. And yet, as Joel Stein described in his virtual Second Life experience,<sup>11</sup> more and more people are having online relationships with avatars and anonymous characters that end up leading to real contact and real temptation.

## National Porn Trends

In 2005, a Kaiser Family Foundation study found that 77% of prime-time shows contained sexual content, up from 67% in 1998. Over 10% of TV shows featured “scenes in which sexual intercourse is either depicted or strongly implied.” According to Ruth Marcus from the Washington Post, “anyone who complacently relies on indecency rules to shield his or her children is committing parental malpractice.”<sup>12</sup>

The group Family Safe Media reported that children between the ages of 12 and 17 are the largest viewers of Internet pornography.<sup>13</sup> *The Washington Post* cited a study in 2004 that said more than 11 million teenagers view Internet pornography on a regular basis.<sup>14</sup> The Justice Department estimates that nine of ten children between the ages of 8 and 16 have been exposed to pornography online.<sup>15</sup>

Symantec Corporation found that 47% of school-age children receive pornographic spam on a daily basis,<sup>16</sup> and representatives from the pornography industry told Congress’ COPA Commission that as much as 20–30% of the traffic to some pornographic web sites comes from children.<sup>17</sup> The National Coalition for the Protection of Children & Families has an excellent website with more statistics and valuable resources to help families deal with the effects of pornography online.<sup>18</sup>

## Devastating Impact of Porn

Lest you think that porn has been around forever and is not really having a major impact on society, consider this comment on cyber-porn: Two-thirds of the divorce lawyers attending a 2002 meeting of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers said excessive interest in online porn contributed to more than half of the divorces they handled that year. They also said pornography had an almost non-existent role in divorce just seven or eight years earlier.<sup>19</sup>

“Pornography is also a significant factor in sexual violence. The FBI reports that the most common interest among serial killers is hardcore pornography. Another



study found that 87% of child molesters were regular consumers of hardcore pornography.”<sup>20</sup>

Do you remember Ted Bundy, the serial killer from Florida? In an interview with Focus on the Family founder Dr. James Dobson just hours before he was executed, Bundy described how early exposure to pornography consumed him and led him down his murderous path.

Like an addiction, you keep craving something which is harder and gives you a greater sense of excitement, until you reach the point where the pornography only goes so far—that jumping off point where you begin to think maybe actually doing it will give you that which is just beyond reading about it and looking at it [...] Those of us who have been so influenced by violence in the media, particularly pornographic violence, are not some kind of inherent monsters. We are your sons and husbands. We grew up in regular families. Pornography can reach in and snatch a kid out of any house today.<sup>21</sup>

Several excellent books have been written that dive deeper into the devastating effects of pornography on family life. For example, in her book, *An Affair of the Mind*, Laurie Hall tells the story of her struggle to protect herself and her children from the nightmare of her husband’s addiction to pornography. Laurie shares personal stories and lessons she learned regarding the virtues of patience, trust, perseverance.

## There but for the Grace of God Go I

You may be thinking that no one can possibly remain pure. It is certainly true that everyone is susceptible to cyber lust—with many women now joining men in destructive behaviors. And yet, the Bible and history are full of sinners who were transformed. It is not too late to change.

The Pharisees once tried to trap Jesus with this situation, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. What do you say?”

After writing on the ground with his finger, Jesus responded “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” After everyone left but the women, he asked her, “Women, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” After she responded in the negative, Jesus responded with these powerful words of forgiveness and grace combined with direction and new purpose. “Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”<sup>22</sup>

Change starts with recognition of the problem and genuine repentance. There is comfort in this promise: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”<sup>23</sup>



My hope is that this paper has opened your eyes to the horrible, pervasive grip that cyber lust and pornography have inflicted upon individuals, families, and onto society. No, this is not innocent “adult entertainment,” nor a healthy behavior. This type of surfing is sinful, and evil forces seek to use lust to eternally destroy you. Don’t allow the enemy a foothold.

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Dan is the author of *Virtual Integrity: Faithfully Navigating the Brave New Web*. Find out more about him at <http://www.virtualintegritybook.com>.



Net Safety Resources provides practical advice for Christians seeking to use the Internet with integrity. It was established in 2010 by Covenant Eyes and Dan Lohrmann.



White papers are available online at: <http://netsafetyresources.com/articles/>

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