

## Sexual Addiction: A Real Problem or a Convenient Excuse?

*This is the first article in a five-part series dealing with the topic of sexual addiction.*

From the show “Sex Rehab” on VH1 to the Tiger Woods’ crisis, it appears that the topic of sexual addiction has surfaced from the shadows into a national conversation. A significant portion of this conversation involves questioning legitimacy of the term “sexual addiction.”

Many argue that this is a convenient term used to give individuals a free pass for undesirable behavior. Others, myself included, argue that this is a real addiction with serious consequences for individuals, families, and communities.

The National Council on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity has defined sexual addiction as “engaging in persistent and escalating patterns of sexual behavior acted out despite increasing negative consequences to self and others.” Or, as I explain to my clients, “if you’re acting in ways that harm yourself or your important relationships, and you can’t stop, then you have a problem that needs to be addressed.”

The label of “addiction” means different things to different people, so I am clear with those who struggle with problematic sexual behaviors that regardless of what we call it, it’s important to do something about it.

One category of sexual behavior that stirs up ongoing debate is the use of pornography. Popular magazines, daytime talk shows, and other media outlets promote the use of pornography as a harmless way to “spice up” relationships and entertain adults.

Dr. Jill C. Manning, a prominent researcher on the social costs of pornography stated, “Those who claim pornography is harmless entertainment, benign sexual expression, or a marital aid, have clearly never sat in a therapist’s office with individuals, couples, or families who are reeling from the devastating effects of this material.”

While it is true that not everyone who views pornography will become addicted to it, the stark reality of the impact of pornography on individuals, families, and communities cannot be ignored. Most pornography use is secretive, yet, still creates emotional consequences, lost productivity, and broken homes.

The Witherspoon Institute, in conjunction with Princeton University, recently released a report entitled “The Social Costs of Pornography: A Statement of Findings and Recommendations” (available at [www.socialcostofpornography.org](http://www.socialcostofpornography.org)). This 64-page document summarizes the broad agreement of over 50 scholars on the negative impact of pornography on society.

Research not only informs policymakers, but also helps convince many who question the impact of their own pornography use on them or their loved ones.

Many ask, "At what point should I get help?" Overcoming any problematic sexual behavior, including compulsive pornography use, is almost impossible to do alone. These behaviors are rooted in deep shame and embarrassment, which keep the individual stuck in a pattern of failed attempts at quitting. Reaching out to someone for help is a significant part of the healing.

If you or someone you love wonders if there is a problem, have the courage to reach out and ask for help. Sexual addiction is not a life-sentence for those who seek help.

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