

## The Origins of Pornography/Sexual Addiction

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

“How can you work with people struggling with pornography/sexual addiction all day long and not let it negatively affect you?” This is one of the most commonly asked questions from clients and associates. My answer is simple: “Because pornography/sexual addiction has more to do with emotions than with sex.”

Much has been written about the way pornography/sexual addiction affects the brain. We know it activates the pleasure centers of the brain much like a drug addiction. We know it creates pathways in the brain that leave individuals with powerful patterns of seeking out a sexual high at any cost. We also know that with certain behavior and thinking changes, individuals can change the “wiring” in their brains to form new pathways.

But how did this process get started in the first place? The answer lies in understanding the need for a secure emotional attachment.

We have a life-long reflex to seek out comfort when we are distressed. From birth, our default reflex is to reach for another human when we’re afraid, lonely, or in pain. This reflex doesn’t disappear as we get older. However, it’s common for individuals to learn that it’s not safe to reach to another person for comfort and relief.

Many individuals grow up in environments where their emotions weren’t taken seriously or completely disregarded. Some discover the powerful comfort and relief found in sexual behaviors (such as looking at pornography, etc) at a young age. Whatever the conditions, individuals who later struggle with pornography/sexual addiction learn at some point in their life that it’s safer to turn to sexual behavior for comfort and relief from emotions than to turn to another person.

This creates a powerful draw toward the sexual behavior, which quickly becomes something they seek out despite negative consequences. It becomes a counterfeit attachment figure.

As a result, the power of the addiction becomes rooted in their need to seek emotional relief, much like one would seek emotional relief and comfort from a parent, spouse, or other attachment figure. Since reaching to the addiction always creates the same predictable relief from pain and distress, it becomes much easier to seek out sexual relief than to risk turning to a person.

Consider the following point from Craig Naken’s book, *The Addictive Personality*:

“These normal ways of achieving intimacy involve reaching out to life. We nurture ourselves by reaching out to others and then inward, to ourselves. In addiction, this

reaching motion is almost totally inward to the point of withdrawing. Addiction exists within the person, and whenever addicts become preoccupied or act in addictive ways, this forces them to withdraw, to isolate themselves from others. The longer an addictive illness progresses, the less a person feels the ability to have meaningful relationships with others. Addiction makes life very lonely and isolated, which creates more of a need for the addict to act out. When the addict hurts, he or she will act out by turning to the addiction for relief, just as someone else may turn to a spouse, a best friend, or spiritual beliefs. For the addict, the mood change created by acting out gives the illusion that a need has been met.”

So, as you can see, it’s not about the sexual behavior. It’s about learning to reach for real emotional relief instead of the mirage of addiction.

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