



Female Porn Users

Why They Watch and How to Help

Ministry Leaders Guidebook No.3

Pornography is mostly a man's problem, right? That's something we tackle in our men's ministry.

Times are changing.

“The attitude among [today's high school and college students] is very much ‘what's the big deal? *Every girl watches pornography.*”¹

Jessica Harris, a blogger and expert on female porn addiction, said she heard this comment from a twelve-year-old girl in a church where she spoke. The girl wasn't exaggerating, either. Churches have reached out to Harris “because anonymous surveys of their youth groups showed 100% of the girls struggled with pornography.”²

For far too long, many have presumed pornography to be exclusively a “man's issue.” However, women now make up 30% of all pornography users. Porn and masturbation are no longer men's problems. They're *human* problems.³

Since 2000, we at Covenant Eyes have been “all-in” on helping men and women break free from digital pornography. We've also been a leader in **educating** men and women about why they click where they do. This Guidebook is the third in a series that we've created specifically for ministry leaders who are being confronted with a growing number of people dealing with pornography.

After reading this and our other Guidebooks, you might begin to realize that the issue is big. You might start to realize that you alone don't have the time or tools to help your people! That's why we're here to help with dedicated, church-serving staff, resources like this Guidebook, and quality software. If at any point while reading this Guidebook you need a lifeline, please contact us at **church@covenanteyes.com**.

Why Do Women Start Looking?

To help the women in our pastoral care, we first need to understand why women struggle in the first place. In at least some respects women have different struggles than men, and every woman's struggle is different.

In *Sexual Addiction: The Way Out of the Web*, June Hunt explains that "sexual addiction in females has different faces and plays different roles. This often makes this addiction difficult to identify [...] and easy to deny. [...] **[For women,] sexual addiction is about connection, closeness, or getting comfort by 'medicating' emotional pain. But it is never about sex!**"⁴

Porn is introduced relationally*

"Overwhelmingly," explains, Jay Stringer, therapist, author and ordained pastor, "children did not 'discover' porn, they were introduced to it."

Many of Pastor Stringer's female clients report finding their father, brother, or extended family member's porn stash in a "hidden," yet completely obvious location. One client was assigned to clean the bathrooms in her grandparents' house; her grandfather's stash was kept right next to the glass cleaner and she became hooked. After years of addiction and shame, she finally sought a women's porn recovery group. As one group member told her, "You don't send your granddaughter to clean the bathroom mirrors and not expect her to find the porn you store next to the glass cleaner."

* The sections "Porn is introduced relationally" and "Porn is substituting parental relationships" were largely excerpted from "Silence: the Sound of Female Sexual Shame," a blog post by Jay Stringer, and is covered in more depth in his book *Unwanted*. See the Resources section for more information.

Others were introduced even more directly. Pastor Stringer explains, “One woman was at a middle school sleepover where her peers introduced her to a celebrity sex tape, another client was in a chat room with an upperclassman from high school when he sent a pornographic file over, and another was in middle school when her boyfriend showed her a video and suggested they should try something similar.”⁵

Porn is substituting parental relationships

Another key driver associated with the introduction of pornography is when a child wants more emotional involvement from their parent. Consider the following:

- The risk *tripled* of being introduced to pornography by someone older for those who, to a very great extent, wanted more of their mother’s involvement.
- The risk *quadrupled* of being asked to sexually stimulate someone during or after pornography when women wanted, to a very great extent, more of their mother’s involvement in childhood.
- Women were *2x more likely* to be introduced to pornography by someone older when they, to very great extent, wanted more involvement with their father.
- The risk of being introduced to pornography by someone older increased from *9% to 38%* when they reported their father showed a very great deal more interest in a sibling.

Women who want more involvement from their parents are not only introduced to pornography at a greater rate, they are also more likely to be sexually abused. The quality of a woman’s childhood relationship with her father is most evident in a woman’s current use of pornography. Women are 56% less likely to struggle with significant pornography viewing as an adult when they had fathers who were emotionally and physically present.⁶

Porn is used to build intimacy

June Hunt explains that for women, sexual addiction is never actually about sex! She says:

“Sex is merely the means to an end but is never the end. Sex is what is given in an attempt to get what is lacking. And since sex is not the ultimate end, this addiction often remains unidentified and untreated. After all, how can a person be addicted to sex when it is merely a means of transportation to a desired destination?”⁷

In order to tap more of the female market, pornographers create porn that specifically appeals to women. According to Mark B. Kastleman,

“Internet pornographers often use ‘average looking’ females as their subjects so that the female viewer can more easily relate by fantasizing or imagining herself playing the role. Likewise, they portray both the male and female pleasuring each other equally. [...] In essence, the Internet pornographers have taken the successful ‘soap opera/romance novel’ genre and wrapped it around pornography in order to seduce the female viewer.”⁸

June Hunt adds, “Technology has set sexual addiction for women on a slippery slide, and many female sex addicts now find themselves at another stage: engaging in cybersex to connect with their Prince Charming.”⁹

A study published in 2000, “Cybersex Users, Abusers, and Compulsives,” found that women tend to be more relational in their internet use and are usually drawn to chat rooms rather than merely viewing pornography. Among their sample of 96 persons whom they termed “cybersex compulsive,” 70% of the 26 women, versus 43% of the 79 men, considered chat rooms their preferred online medium.¹⁰

In another article published around the same time, Jennifer Schneider reports that a similar proportion of men (27%) and women (30%) engaged in real-time online sex with another person, but significantly more women than men (80% versus 33.3%) stated that their online sexual activities had led to real-life sexual encounters.¹¹

While these findings are old, they still track with modern technology away from chat rooms to sexting and other tools like Snapchat. A 2016 study by the Barna Group found that among teens and young adults, more females had both received and sent nude images of themselves than males.

- 69% of females had received a nude image, compared to 57% of males.
- 51% of females had sent a sext, compared to 33% of males.

In both cases, most of the time the sexts were sent between boyfriends and girlfriends.¹² While the Barna Group was reluctant to draw conclusions, when pairing these findings with the previous study, it seems reasonable that young women would be more likely to engage in sexting precisely to draw closer to their significant other.

Porn is just plain common

Pornography use among women escalates dramatically as the generation gets younger. In 2016, the Barna Group found that 33% of females age 13-24 seek out porn at least monthly. At age 25, the rate drops to 12%.¹³

The most likely reason for this generation gap is simply that technology has shifted. The first iPhone was released in 2007; the first iPad in 2010. Those younger than 24 (and especially those in the 13-17 range) likely would have received their first (unmonitored) mobile device before they left home, giving them even easier access to pornography than the family computer. Similarly, even if their parents did not give them their own smartphone or tablet, their friends probably had one, and may have shown them porn on the school bus, or on the playground.

Even when parental controls are set, content slips past filters all the time. In his article "Something is wrong on the internet," James Bridle systematically walked through numerous examples of content creators who were deliberately manipulating YouTube's algorithms and keywords to target strange and outright disturbing content to children within YouTube Kids, including sexual content.¹⁴

All of this adds up to a simple fact: porn is readily available, especially to our teens. And increasingly, girls are as likely to be addicted to porn as boys.

Lies Women Believe About Their Porn Use*

While porn use is increasingly common among women, most church teaching has not caught up to it. Porn is still treated as mostly a man's problem, since men stereotypically are the ones who are stimulated visually. This results in feelings of isolation for many women, especially older strugglers. And that isolation makes it very difficult to be open about their struggles, or even to seek help. In a talk for the 2016 Set Free Global Summit, Jessica Harris pointed out that women may tentatively seek to open the door and ask for help exactly once; if they're shut down before they can even begin to speak about their own personal issues, they may never try to open up again.¹⁵ Blogger Kristen Clark points out that this is incredibly damaging, since women "need openness, relationships and accountability to break through and overcome pornography and masturbation."¹⁶

Clark explains that there are four reasons why women aren't honest about their sexual struggles and these are what keep women in the addictive cycle. Each "reason" begins with a lie.

Lie 1: Sexual sin is supposed to be a "male issue," so I must be weird.

Bookstores are filled with purity books directed toward men. Churches often host purity studies for men. Whenever lust is mentioned, it's often referred to as a "man's struggle." This reality has caused many Christian women to feel isolated, alone, and weird when it comes to their own sexual struggles.

Clark believed she was the only female who struggled with sexual sin. This made it feel impossible to be honest. However, the more she realized that she wasn't alone in the struggle, the easier it was for her to confess her sin and seek accountability.

* Much of the section "Lies Women Believe About Their Porn Use" was excerpted and adapted from a blog post by Kristen Clark, <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2018/05/23/reasons-women-struggle-to-be-honest-about-sexual-sin/>

But the reality is, female strugglers are not weird. As Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Women are sinners who struggle with sin too. Yes, even sexual sin. Lust is a female problem too.

Lie 2: Everybody views me as the “good Christian woman,” so I can’t be honest.

A woman’s reputation and pride often keep her from being honest about her own sin. Ironically, by staying silent, women are actually being even more dishonest about who they truly are. Encourage the women in your community to not let their “good Christian woman” image keep them from being authentic about where they’re at.

Christ died on the cross for all of us, including female porn users, because we’re sinners—not because they’re perfect Christian women (Romans 3:10). Even outwardly “good” Christian women who struggle desperately need His transforming grace and forgiveness in their lives. For all of us, including women, confessing sin is the only sure path to freedom.

Lie 3: Maybe what I’m doing isn’t really that bad after all.

The longer female strugglers keep their sin hidden, the more they will try to protect it, excuse it, and shield it. They tell themselves the lie that “it’s not that bad.” They convince themselves time and time again that it’s okay. That it’s not hurting anyone.

What brought author Kristen Clark to her knees and what compelled her to confess her own sexual struggles was the reality of how ugly her sin was before God. When she held her sin up next to God’s holiness and beauty, she fell to her knees in brokenness and repentance. She realized that she had been worshipping her own desires and pleasure above her Creator. Jesus is worthy to be honored and praised (Revelation 4:11). May all of us strive after holiness in every corner of our lives.¹⁷

Take Action:

Helping Female Strugglers in Your Church or Ministry

Now that you have a greater awareness of the scope of female porn use, as well as of some of the impacts specific to women, it's time to take action to help the women in your congregation or organization find freedom. But just as some aspects of the struggle are unique to women, some aspects of recovery will be unique as well.

Break the silence

The continued cultural silence for female pornography use has driven many women further into the shadows. Silence intensifies shame and therefore deepens their involvement in the very behavior they may wish to stop.

To break the silence:

- Break away from stereotypes when talking about pornography and sex in general. Minimally, when talking about porn use, say “men and women” instead of just talking about it as a man’s issue. But there are also passages in scripture where the woman comes into a sexual relationship as an equal, such as the seductress in Proverbs 7, or the woman at the well in John 4. (Do be careful, though, that you don’t read equal sexual desires into stories where the man is an authority figure, such as in the case of David and Bathsheba or Ahasuerus and Esther.)

- Share specific stories about female pornography usage from the pulpit. Ideally, this would be from a member of your church or organization who is willing to share her story, but there are plenty of stories available online as well. Jessica Harris of beggarsdaughter.com and Crystal Renaud of dirtygirlsministries.com are two of the most vocal leaders, but there are additional stories at covenanteyes.com/blog.
- Speak hope! God is not awkward or timid about sex but wove pleasure intimately into the design of women's bodies. The more they learn, the more they find the Apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6 to be true: God is *for* her body, not for the sexual immorality she was set up to find when pornography was put in her path.

Form a team of trusted women

As you speak more publicly about pornography, you may find that women begin coming to you, seeking counseling for porn use. In most cases, male pastors should *not* counsel female strugglers. Jessica Harris explains,

“One of the pitfalls of her struggle could be emotional dependency. **If she's using pornography to meet some sort of emotional need or desire to be needed by men and you agree to counsel her, guess what you just became.** You just became her 'porn surrogate.’”¹⁸

Instead, Harris counsels that you need to create a team of trusted women who can provide ongoing counseling and accountability. She says, “The most important thing to remember is **you don't need to assemble a team of former porn addicts.** Find women who are simply willing to sit, listen, and lead, but who are also strong enough to put up solid boundaries, because those will be important.”¹⁹

Prepare parents

Many parents assume their daughters are immune to visual temptations like porn. As this Guidebook proved, they're not immune. This means that parents *must* take the lead in teaching their daughters and sons about sexual temptations and preparing them for how to handle it.

For daughters, this means teaching more than “purity culture.” From a young age, girls need to learn that their sexual desires are both God-given and prone to sin. They need to learn why God’s plan is better, especially in a world where they will be pushed to send sexts from a very young age. They need to learn that their dignity and value comes from being created in the image of God, and that God loves them and wants what’s best for them. In other words, they need to ground their identity in Christ.

That means parents need to take some more practical steps as well. Parents need to train both their daughters and their sons how to respond when someone shows them porn (remember, porn is often introduced relationally). They especially need to train their daughters how to respond when the world tries to pornify them: how to respond to catcalls and verbal harassment (both out loud and internally), how to respond to inappropriate physical contact, such as groping, and especially how to respond to sexual abuse. They also need to understand appropriate boundaries, and how to respond when even a trusted adult crosses them (and often, sexual abuse comes from trusted adults). In short, parents need to make sure that they are safe spaces, so their daughters always feel safe coming to them about uncomfortable issues, whether it’s their best friend showing them porn or a family member inappropriately touching them.

As a church leader, there are a few ways to encourage this. The first is to encourage openness in parenting during your messages. Second, consider working with your children’s ministers to organize a special parenting weekend. This may include a special evening session for any parent with kids in Sunday School or youth group. The Covenant Eyes Professional Services team would love to work with you on setting up a weekend like this. Contact us at [**church@covenanteyes.com**](mailto:church@covenanteyes.com) for more information.

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Get Personal Help for Your Ministry

At Covenant Eyes, we're here to help support the women in your church who are struggling with pornography. We want to help open up the conversation and provide the opportunity to heal from the shame they have experienced caused by so much silence on the topic of female struggle. Through Covenant Eyes, we can equip you with a customized roadmap that uses expertise gained from working with thousands of Christian leaders. We will also co-develop a list of specific actions you can take to protect your people from online threats. Along with staff training, a digital health assessment for your church, quality software and more, this will give you what it takes to help your people as they seek to overcome porn.

Recommended Resources

For the last decade, Covenant Eyes has been gathering and producing a number of resources dealing with all aspects of pornography, from prevention to the neuroscience to recovery. The following resources are hand-picked as some of our most helpful for you as a ministry leader. Be sure to check out our blog and other ebooks at covenanteyes.com. Some of the resources below were mentioned in the Guidebook. Others are simply included to make leaders aware of what resources are available.

Counseling Resources

Hobbies and Habits: Fighting Porn with Purpose

Intentionally light on theology, this book looks at the practical side of porn recovery, and provides strategies to not just quit porn, but replace it with healthier behaviors.

learn.covenanteyes.com/hobbies-and-habits/

More Than Single: Finding Purpose Beyond Porn

Recovery strategies often focus on marital sex as better than porn, but that can be frustrating to singles. This ebook speaks specifically to the sexual temptations and challenges singles face and give them hope for a porn-free life.

covenanteyes.com/singles-guide/

Overcome Porn: The 40 Day Challenge

Available as a free email series or as an app for iPhone® and iPad®, this challenge provides 40 days of biblical information about the science of pornography and how accountability is key to recovery.

learn.covenanteyes.com/porn-free-challenge/

Transformed by Beauty

In this inspirational ebook, a priest, a ballerina, and a body builder share their stories of how their lives were changed because they encountered the beauty of a transcendent God. This beauty helped them find freedom, inner healing, peace, and strength in ways they never imagined.

info.covenanteyes.com/transformed-by-beauty

Further Pastoral Resources

The Prepared Ministry: Policies that Heal and Protect from Porn

This deeply practical Guidebook outlines four key behaviors of organizations that are successful in helping their staff and people defend themselves against pornography. It's a 15-minute read that could change how you lead your organization.

learn.covenanteyes.com/ready-ministry-guide/

Men and Porn: Why They Watch and How to Help

You know the stats. A lot of men look at porn. Christian men. Non-Christian men. Rich men. Poor men. But, Ministry Leader, do you know why? Have you ever looked deeper than, "Hey, you must have a lust problem," and dug into the hearts of the men you talk to? This book will teach you the top 7 reasons men are attracted to porn, and give you action steps to help you counsel them well.

learn.covenanteyes.com/hooked-ministry-guide/

Resources by Covenant Eyes Partners

Unwanted: How Sexual Brokenness Reveals Our Way to Healing

Jay Stringer

In his counseling ministry, Jay Stringer noticed a pattern: people's unwanted sexual behaviors often stemmed from childhood abuse and other specific relational factors. In this book, he shares the results of a study on over 3,800 men and women

dealing with unwanted sexual behaviors and how our specific lusts can provide roadmaps for recovery.

Learn more and buy it at <http://jay-stringer.com/>

Journey Into the Heart of Man

The team behind the *Heart of Man* documentary has partnered with Jay Stringer to create an 18-week course to help men and women find the roots of unwanted sexual behavior so that they can find healing and lasting freedom.

Learn more at <https://heartofman.thinkific.com/?ref=88243b>

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Special thanks to Jay Stringer and Kristen Clark for allowing us to publish extended excerpts from guest posts on the Covenant Eyes blog.

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