

CHRISTIAN VOL. 23 NO. 2
counseling
TODAY



TECHNOLOGY,
COUNSELING
& MENTAL
HEALTH

Is Technology Stealing Your Brain?

Daniel Amen

Violent Video End Games

Gregory Jantz

Cyberbullying: An Old Enemy Gets a New, Terrifying Face

Paul Asay

Sexting: Laws, Issues, and Minors

Jenna Ellis

Online Pornography and the Loss of Marital Intimacy

Mark and Debbie Laaser

The Big Disconnect: Technology and Relationships

W. Jesse Gill

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ONLINE PORNOGRAPHY AND THE LOSS OF MARITAL INTIMACY

Over the years, we have counseled hundreds of couples for whom the husband has committed infidelity in a variety of ways; and our most common expression of it has been pornography and masturbation. Those two almost always go together. This has been our professional experience.

Our personal experience with this topic also includes the history of Mark's sexual addiction, first confronted in 1987. We have been in recovery ourselves for more than 30 years. Following are our thoughts about what has been helpful for us and those we counsel.

Pornography use is a serious problem and often leads to sexual addiction. Components of the latter would include powerlessness and an inability to stop even though you desire to do so. Addiction also creates neurochemical tolerance, as the brain can become tolerant to the neurochemicals of sexual arousal—such as adrenaline and dopamine. Whether it is a problem or an addiction, there are consequences to marital closeness.

The Physical Impact of Pornography and Sex Addiction

We have long known that usage of pornography and masturbation lead to erectile difficulty. This is because the addict has conditioned himself to orgasm to thoughts outside the marriage and the friction of his own hand. He has also trained himself to orgasm quickly, thus making the experience of marital, vaginal sex frustrating and unsatisfying. Psychologists have recently labeled this phenomenon, “pornography induced erectile dysfunction” or PIED.

A core belief of sexual addicts is, “sex is my most important need.” When the energy of this belief is brought into the marriage, the spouse can feel objectified—there is a “taking,” not “sharing,” of her body that does not feel loving. Furthermore, she often does not understand why she feels sad or “used” because she does not know about his pornography use or sexual addiction. Sex can also be used to de-stress the day, feel less lonely, or help one fall asleep. Once again, it is difficult for a partner to feel chosen when sex is used for these purposes.

More sex can become the proposed solution, but the sexual desire of a sexual addict progresses over time. If a spouse submits to these physical drives, it can make the problem worse. It is no different than giving someone who struggles with alcohol more alcohol to satisfy his or her problem!



The Emotional Impact of Pornography and Sex Addiction

Pornography and sex addiction are coping behaviors that are used to avoid or suppress feelings. In clinical terms, it is the way addicts learn to affectively regulate their emotions. In the bigger picture, then, emotions are not talked about and emotional intimacy is compromised. Any coping behavior or substance used to escape feelings (food, alcohol, organizing, work, withdrawal, sex, sports, kids, socializing, technology, etc.) lead to distancing in a relationship. Coping behaviors and substances are self-centered. They are used by someone to survive or medicate feelings he or she does not want to experience. When they are used, growing closer to someone in a relationship is sacrificed.

The Relational Impact of Pornography and Sex Addiction

The use of pornography and/or sexually-addictive behavior

involves secrets, lying, and hiding, which lead to broken trust and feeling unsafe. Most spouses report that the lying about these behaviors was extremely more hurtful than the sexual acts themselves, and it disrupted their entire sense of safety in the relationships. When people feel unsafe, they focus on taking care of themselves and pull away from the person creating the unsafety—thus a relationship will deteriorate and “distance” will be felt. For many of the couples we have counseled, this distance causes a pathological shutdown of romantic and sexual intimacy, something we call sexual anorexia.

Until there is a foundation of truth-telling in the relationship, there will be distance. On our Web site, you will find a document that we have created on how clinicians can help couples share in full disclosure to begin the journey of truth-telling.¹

MARK AND DEBBIE LAASER



The Spiritual Impact of Pornography and Sex Addiction

We believe that healthy sexuality is the expression of emotional and spiritual connection. The first expression of sex in the Bible appears in Genesis 4:1, where it describes that Adam “knew” Eve. What did God have in mind when He was asking us to *know* each other? The Hebrew verb, *yada*, like many Old and New Testament words, is very holistic. David uses this word throughout the Psalms to refer to knowing God. This makes it rather clear that there is both a spiritual and emotional dimension. We also believe that this physical, spiritual, and emotional knowing is what the Old Testament refers to when Jesus and Paul talk about a couple coming together to form a “one flesh union” (Genesis 2:24, Mark 10:8, Ephesians 5:31). Paul compares that union to be like the relationship of Christ to the Church which, of course, is a sacrificial one (Ephesians 5:32).

We believe that any couple should not be sexual if they cannot honestly say they are spiritually and emotionally connected. Also, we do not think couples should be sexual if either of their brains cannot be present in the room. In other words, thoughts are about each other, not worrying about the past or imagining other people or experiences. For some couples, it is possible to change this pattern by having sex in a position where they are face-to-face with their eyes open.

There is no doubt that God created our bodies to enjoy a physical connection through our sexuality. However, if sex is used to “take” from another to calm anxiety, distress after a hard day or create closeness when all else is chaotic or disconnected, it does not satisfy the soul. When a couple has created *yada* love first—love that is authentic and vulnerable—then their sexual intimacy becomes an expression of that love—and it feels holy and good. And whatever it is and whenever it happens, it is enough.

We also use a tool for couples called, “the abstinence contract.” It is based on 1 Corinthians 7:5, in which Paul

teaches us that we should not deprive each other, except for a time and by mutual consent, so we can devote ourselves to prayer and fasting. The contract asks couples to take sex out for an agreed-upon time (we recommend 90 days). In the meantime, they devote time to spiritual and emotional connection through prayer, meditation, Bible study, setting aside time to talk, or reading spiritual books together.²

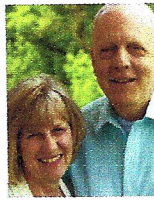
Prevention and/or Intervention of Pornography Use and Sexual Addiction

The following are bullet points of factors we believe lead to marital healing from pornography or sexual addiction.^{3,4} With the limitations of this article, we encourage you to look at our other resources for additional explanation of these points.

- Accept that pornography is not healthy.
- Be willing to name pornography as adultery and get help.
- Be broken and remorseful for the hurt and harm pornography has done.
- Seek counseling for the root causes, the “why”—not just help to stop the behaviors.
- Examine your past so you do not repeat it and change what caused the pain using healthy solutions.
- Stay sober and regularly offer information about sobriety to your spouse.
- Be totally truthful about sexual history—and be a truth-teller about *all* things.
- Involve both spouses in the journey of emotional and spiritual growth.
- Learn to own/apologize for things you do that hurt others.
- Be safe people for each other—verbally, physically, financially, sexually, and spiritually.
- Learn to talk about triggers and difficult things in a safe and connecting way.⁵

- Take care of mental health issues: depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention deficit disorder, etc.
- Create vision together—know where you want to go in life together.
- Find purpose in your pain—how has God used it to make you better people?
- Accept that there is no perfect spouse.

Couples can heal from the pain of pornography or sexual addiction. They can, in fact, thrive and not just survive. We believe that with the right resources and community, growth is possible for individuals and their marriages. God does not waste pain. He uses it to strengthen our character and transform us (James 1:2).⁶ ✦



MARK LAASER, M.DIV., PH.D., AND DEBBIE LAASER, M.A., LMFT, are the founders of Faithful & True, a leading Christian counseling center for sexual addiction and relational betrayal, located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As husband and wife, Mark and Debbie know, from more than 30 years of personal experience, the healing journey from the pain of sexual addiction. Together, they have authored/coauthored over a dozen books on this subject and lead intensive workshops for men, their spouses, and couples who are struggling with sexual purity, infidelity, and relational issues.

Endnotes

- ¹ www.faithfulandtrue.com/product/full-disclosure/.
- ² www.faithfulandtrue.com/product/abstinence-contract/.
- ³ Laaser, M. (1992). *Healing the wounds of sexual addiction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- ⁴ Laaser, D. (2008). *Shattered vows*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- ⁵ Laaser, M., & Laaser, D. (2008). *Seven desires*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- ⁶ Laaser, D., Putney, H., Bundick, D., Delmonico, D., & Griffin, E. (2017). Post-traumatic growth in relationally betrayed women. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 43, 435-447.


HEALING WELL and LIVING FREE Are WITHIN REACH

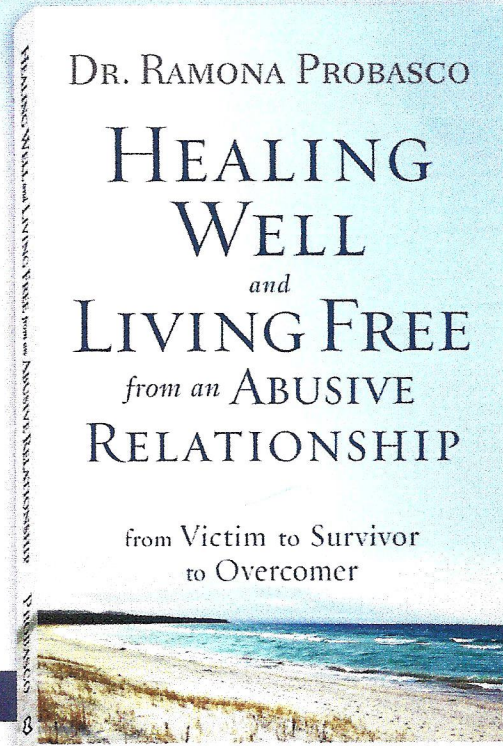
Abuse breaks the spirit and leaves wreckage in its path. But it does not have to be the end of the story. Healing well and living free are within reach. In this practical book, Dr. Ramona walks with you on a proven path from victim to survivor to overcomer.

This is a must-read for anyone who is suffering or has suffered abuse at the hands of an intimate partner. There is hope!

Find Dr. Ramona online at

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