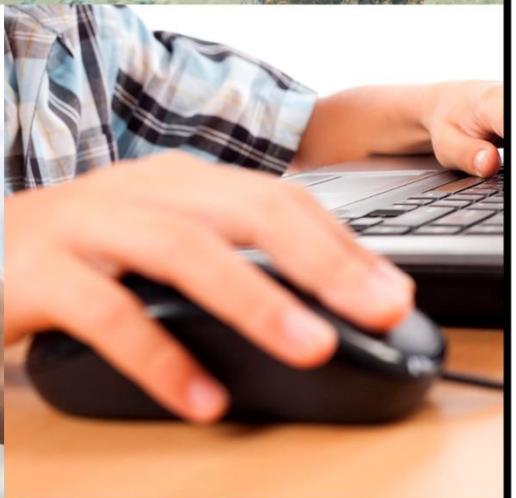


THE PORN EPIDEMIC

Facts
Stats &
Solutions

by: Josh D. McDowell

Why Do I Continue to Struggle...19 Possible Motives



Why Do I Continue to Struggle?!?

19 Possible Motive-Triggers for Pornography

By: Brad Hambrick

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“Why? Why? Why?! This is a vexing question. As soon as you say ‘because...’ you run the risk of blame-shifting. But in the absence of a ‘because...’ it sounds like you should just be able to ‘Stop it!’”

“Part of this confusion begins with how we commonly view people. It is popular to think of ourselves as basically good people who apart from outside interference would not do bad things: act selfishly, betray, sacrifice more important things for less important things, or otherwise be foolish.”

“The power of all temptation is the prospect that it will make me happier. No one sins out of a sense of duty (p. 334).”

John Piper in *Future Grace*

“We are born twisted, broken, and out of order. We are born with a bent towards self and we experience life self-centeredly (trapped within our bodies; literally only seeing the world through our own eyes and interpreting it through our own experiences and desires). This does not mean that we cannot love. It does mean we must be both commanded and enabled to love God and love others because our sin-nature causes us to innately center on self.”

“Some would take this to mean that personal history (i.e.: experiences of abuse, rejection, failure, or neglect) is inconsequential to sexual sin. But this draws an unnecessary distinction between our sin nature and personal history. While we sin because we are sinners, our appetite for and bondage to particular sins have histories. Understanding these histories can enhance our ability to cooperate with or apply God’s power to change.”

“There are two truths you must keep in balance as you work through this material or you will fall into shame/despair or blame shifting. First, sin reveals our heart so we are responsible for our sin and change will require dying to self. Second, our heart has a history and God wants to do more than eliminate a sin; God wants to redeem your history by replacing lies with truth, despair with hope, and self with Him.”

“With that said, let’s begin to consider the relationship between motives (*why* we do what we do) and triggers (*when* we do what we do). Too often triggers and motives are treated as two distinct things, and there are differences. But those differences are more akin to two sides of the same coin than apples and oranges. In this article you will examine the things that trigger your sexual sin and the motives attached to those triggers.”

“As you identify the trigger-motive for your sexual sin, we also want you to begin to see how you are treating your sin like a friend, ally, refuge, etc.... These insights are essential for repentance to make sense as a central part of change. Unless we see how our sin seeks to replace God in our life, then our need to be made right with God comes across as if God is unduly hung up about our sexuality.”

“Your struggle with sexual addiction doesn’t start with your behavior. It begins with what you want, what you live for (p. 6).” David Powlison in *Sexual Addiction*

1. “Boredom (Sin as My Joy)”

“When boredom is our trigger to sexual sin, then sin has become our joy. When there is a moment to be filled with something of our choosing, we pursue sin to fill the void rather than God or any of His legitimate pleasures. We begin to lose our appetite for godly pleasure like the child who eats sweets and stops wanting healthy food. Even as they feel sluggish from the ups and downs of sugary ‘treats’ they fail to connect this to their diet but go instead for another sugar high as the ‘obvious’ solution.”

“Sex is not ultimate... Idols begin as good things to which we give too much importance, and few things slide over into idolatry with greater frequency or greater power than sex. We allow a good gift of God to supersede the God who gave it. Sex is good, even great, but it’s not ultimate (p. 61).” -- Tim Challies in *Sexual Detox*

“Read Nehemiah 8:9-12: God is a God of great joys and pleasure. Too often we view God as so serious that we believe ‘fun’ must be in His opposite direction. When God called Israel to repentance through Nehemiah and Ezra, He asked them to express their repentance in celebration. If the motive of boredom leads you to sin, then allow this passage to challenge your view of God.”

2. “Loneliness (Sin as My Friend)”

“When loneliness is our trigger to sexual sin, then sin becomes our ‘friend.’ Sexual sin is always relational whether the relationship is fictional or physical, so it fits loneliness well. It is as if our sin (a person, a chat room, or a video) calls to us, ‘Tell me your troubles.’ We are glad to pull up a chair and unload. As we do, talking to a real person or one who is not part of our sin becomes too risky. We now fear being judged or known by anyone but our ‘friend.’”

“It’s a perfect world that I can create. Things always go exactly my way. People do exactly what I want. I’m always on top. Fantasy is a great ego-feeder (p. 19).” Anonymous testimony in David Powlison’s

Pornography: Slaying the Dragon.

“Read Proverbs 27:6: During sexual sin we write this proverb backwards. We believe, ‘Faithful are the kisses of any enemy; profuse are the wounds of a friend.’ When sin reverses the roles of friend and enemy, it has trapped us until we return the right labels to the people in our lives. If the motive of loneliness leads you to sexual sin, then prayerfully examine who or what you are calling ‘friend.’”

3. “Stress (Sin as My Comforter)”

“When stress is our trigger to sexual sin, then sin becomes our comforter. We run to it, her, or him. Sin or our adultery partner makes things better (at least as long as it, she, or he remains hidden and keeps us to themselves). Yet the comfort takes on an addictive quality. The stress from which we are relieved is multiplied by the stress it, she, or he creates. This keeps us in a cycle of stress and returning to a primary source of stress for relief.”

“We crave intimacy at a relational level. We feel lonely. But we also fear intimacy. We’re not sure we can attain it or be vulnerable enough to handle it (p. 47).” Tim Chester in *Closing the Window*

“Read John 14:25-31: Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as ‘the Helper’ or ‘the Comforter’ (v. 26) and as the source of peace that is distinct from the world’s peace which always returns us to fear (v. 27). If a source of comfort does not allow you to be more real with more people, then it is not true comfort. It is a drug that numbs you before it makes you sick. If the motive of stress leads you to sexual sin, then examine whether your ‘comfort’ is real or a form of relational self-medication.”

4. “Frustration (Sin as My Peace)”

“When frustration is our trigger to sexual sin, then sin becomes our source of peace. Sin is treated as an ‘oasis.’ When this happens we label sin as our ‘safe place’ as compared to the parts of life that are upsetting. This

makes sin our friend and anyone or anything that opposes or interferes with our sin our enemy.”

“Read Romans 16:17-20 and I Thessalonians 5:22-24: Notice that each of the passages refer to knowing the God of peace as the alternative to falling into temptations based upon deceitful desires. Where you turn for peace from what frustrates you is the determining variable of their character. Once you declare something or someone as the source of your peace, you will be loyal to and obey it.”

5. “Fatigue (Sin as My Source of Life)”

“When fatigue is our trigger to sexual sin, then sin becomes our source of life. We turn to sin as our boost to get through the day. The thought of our sin keeps us going when we feel like giving up. The adrenaline of sexual satisfaction (physical or romantic) becomes a drug that we use to artificially stimulate ourselves and one that we begin to wonder whether we could live without.”

“Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18: This passage uses many words that can be synonyms for fatigue: afflicted (v. 8), perplexed (v. 8), persecuted (v. 9), struck down (v. 9), and wasting away (v. 16). Fatigue can make you feel alone and sexual sin becomes your life giving companion. Paul says that it is only Christ who can be the life in us that counters the fatiguing death around us (v. 10-12). To doubt this truth reveals that we are believing (or at least listening attentively to) lies.”

6. “Hurt (Sin as My Refuge)”

“When hurt is our trigger for sexual sin, then sin becomes our refuge. In our moments of sinful escape we feel protected from life and a growing allegiance develops towards our sin. In actuality our sexual sin provides as much protection as a child pulling the covers over his/her head, but in our moment of hurt we are appreciative for even the pseudo-refuge of sin compared to the perceived absence of any other refuge.”

“Read Psalm 31: This Psalm alternates between a cry for help and a song of confidence. In this the Psalm reveals the realness with which Scripture speaks to life. Sexual sin is a pseudo-refuge on demand. Even when we cannot have the sin, we can fantasize about his/her presence. However, the real refuge of God is available through the same type of prayerful-meditative exercise as our fantasy, but is able to actually deliver us through the guidance of Scripture, the presence of His Spirit, and the involvement of His people.”

7. “Betrayal (Sin as My Revenge)”

“When betrayal is our trigger for sexual sin, then sin becomes our revenge. We know how powerful betrayal is (especially sexual betrayal), so we decide to use its power for our purposes to avenge those who have hurt us. Blinded by pain we try to use pain to conquer pain but it only multiplies pain. We continue this potentially infinite domino train that pummels us with alternating experiences of betrayal’s pain and betraying’s shame in spite of knowing how it perpetuates pain.”

“Read Romans 12:17-21: It is so tempting to read this passage as God ‘holding you back’ from sweet relief and satisfaction. But, in reality, it is God ‘holding you back’ from turning another’s betrayal into self-destruction. God is not removing vengeance. God is simply saying He is the only one who can handle its power without being overcome by it. Sin can never conquer sin, any more than oil can remove a stain from your clothes. It is foolish to believe that your sexual sin could do what only Christ’s death on the cross could do – bring justice to injustice.”

8. “Bitterness (Sin as My Justice)”

“When bitterness is our trigger for sexual sin, then sin becomes our justice. If sin as revenge is fast and hot, then sin as justice is slow and cold. No longer are we seeking to hurt another by our actions; now we are merely nursing our wound. If we tried to explain our sin in words, we would have to say we believed our sin had some healing power. But because that seems foolish, we are more prone to just excuse our sin by the sin done to us.”

“Read Hebrews 12:15-17: In this passage a ‘root of bitterness’ is directly linked to sexual sin (v. 16). When bitterness distorts our perspective we will trade things of great value (our integrity and/or family unity) for things of little value (a sexual release or fantasy briefly brought to life) like Esau who sold his birthright for a bowl of soup.”

9. “Opportunity (Sin as My Pleasure)”

“When opportunity is our trigger for sexual sin, then sin becomes our pleasure. Often sexual sin requires no more trigger than time alone with a computer, a free moment to text, or an available member of the opposite sex to ‘talk’ (i.e.: flirt or allow to carry my burdens). When this is the case, sexual sin has become our default recreation; our preferred hobby. The more our sexual sin seeps into the common parts of life the more pervasive the lifestyle and heart changes necessary to root it out.”

“The reality is that often we dislike the shame and consequences of sin, but we still like the sin itself... That’s because porn is pleasurable. Let’s be honest about that. If we pretend otherwise, we’ll never fight it successfully. People like watching porn—otherwise they wouldn’t watch. The Bible talks about the pleasures of sin. They’re temporary. They’re dangerous. They’re empty pleasures, compared with the glory of God. But they are pleasures, nonetheless (p. 15).”
Tim Chester in *Closing the Window*

“Read Philippians 3:17-21: Paul is addressing those whose ‘god is their belly’ (v. 19). These are people whose basic appetites, the mundane parts of their life, were at odds with God. Paul wept at the thought of people in this condition (v. 18). Chances are they had become so comfortable serving their appetites that it would seem odd that Paul was crying for them and ‘radical’ to change. If mere opportunity has become a primary trigger for you sin, let this passage shock you awake!”

10. “Rejection (Sin as My Comfort)”

“When rejection is our trigger for sexual sin, then sin becomes our comfort. Our culture has made things done from a ‘fear of rejection’ seem neutral; as if the defensive motive negated the badness of sin; as if we become the victim of our own sin when we fear rejection. The problem with a fear of rejection is that it makes us foolish. Only the fear of the Lord can make us wise (Prov. 1:7). When we react from a fear of rejection, we naturally seek the comfort of people rather than the comfort of God.”

“Once we understand that the primary goal of sexually addictive behavior is to avoid relational pain—essentially, to control life—we can begin to uncover the core problem (20)... Several tiers below the surface is a pervasive, integral force that demands the right to avoid pain and experience self-fulfillment. This self-centered energy is the very essence of what the Bible calls ‘sin’ (p. 24).” Harry Schaumburg in *False Intimacy*

“Read Proverbs 29:25: Scripture calls the ‘fear of rejection’ the ‘fear of man.’ It is not innocent because it replaces God as the One for whose approval we live. It is the values, character, and preferences of the one we fear that influence our decisions, emotions, morality, and instinctive responses. If rejection is your primary motive for sexual sin, allow this passage to challenge the orientation of your life.”

11. “Failure (Sin as My Success)”

“When failure is our trigger for sexual sin, then sin becomes our success. In the fantasy world of sexual sin (porn, romance media, or adultery), you always win. You get the girl. You are the beauty who is rescued. No part of real life can compete with the early success rate of sin. Sin pays up front and costs in the back. Real success costs up front and pays in the back. In healthy marriages sacrifice is a primary part of the joy. As you give into sexual sin as a form of success it will drive you to desire the kinds of successes that destroy a family. Even if the adultery relationship is made permanent, it will then become ‘real’ enough that it will no longer play by

your preferred rules of success.”

“Read Matthew 21:28-32: Why would the second son say, ‘I go, sir’ and not do the assigned task (v. 30)? One potential reason is the fear of failure. Doubtless he would then view his father as upset with him and feel closer to someone who only asked of him what he wanted to do (i.e., porn, romantic media, or adultery partner). Using sexual sin as cheap success results in harming real relationships, lying, defensiveness towards being ‘judged,’ and retreating to unhealthy or fictitious relationships. Rather than grading others by how they make you feel, repent of your fear of failure.”

12. “Success (Sin as My Reward)”

“When success is our trigger for sexual sin, then sin becomes our reward. Has your sexual sin become what you do when you need a break or what you have ‘earned’ after completing something difficult? Has your sexual sin become the carrot you dangle in front of yourself in order to maintain motivation? When sin becomes our reward we feel cheated by repentance. God and anyone who speaks on His behalf becomes a kill-joy.”

“Read Hebrews 11:23-28: Moses was faced with a choice between which reward he believed would be most satisfying: the treasure of Egypt or the privilege of being God’s servant (v. 26). Sexual sin gives us a similar reward choice: easy treasure or humble servant. Unless Christ is our hero and God our admired Father, then the choice seems like a no-brainer in the direction of destruction.”

13. “Entitlement (Sin as My Deserved)”

“When entitlement is our trigger for sexual sin, then sin becomes what we deserve. When you are confronted with your sexual sin, do you think or say, ‘How else am I going to get what I need... deserve... earned?’ Can you see how sexual sin has become your measure for a ‘good day’ and whether someone is ‘for’ or ‘against’ you? Are you willing to allow anyone other than Christ who died for the sin you are trying to squeeze life out of to

be the measure of ‘good’ in your life?”

“Read Jeremiah 6:15 and 8:12: The people of God had lost their ability to blush at sin. Why? One possible explanation (that can explain our inability to blush even if it doesn’t apply to them), is they believed they deserved their sin. When this happens, we believe we know better than God. We believe the unique features of our life trump the timeless truths of God’s created order. Our confidence to debate robs us of the humility necessary to blush.”

14. “Desire to Please (Sin as My Affirmation)”

“When the desire to please is our trigger for sexual sin, then sin becomes our affirmation. It is easy to please a porn star or an adultery partner. They have a vested interest in being pleased. The entire relationship is based upon commerce (‘the customer is always right’) or convenience (‘if I am not pleasing to you, you have somewhere else to return’) rather than commitment (‘I choose you unconditionally and faithfully in good times and in bad’). Too often sexual sin becomes a place of escape when we don’t feel like we can make everyone/anyone happy.”

“Read Ephesians 4:25-32: Notice that the type of relational interaction described in these verses is incompatible with an overly strong desire to please others. We cannot live the life God called us to (regardless of whether we are sinning sexually or not) if our driving desire is the affirmation of others. Our conversation must be gracious and good for building up (v. 29), but that assumes that we are willing to speak into areas of weakness with those we love.”

15. “Time of Day (Sin as Pacifier)”

“When time of day is our trigger for sexual sin, then sin becomes our pacifier. Do you use your sexual sin to help you sleep, get the day started, serve as a pick-me-up, fight boredom, or kill dead time? What are the common times of day or week when you struggle with sexual sin? When has your sexual sin become routine?”

“Read I Timothy 4:7-10: When you use sin as a pacifier you are training yourself for ungodliness (contra. v. 7). Often, because these occurrence happen during down times or transitions of our day, we view these occurrences of sin as less bad. We view them more like a child who is still sucking his/her fingers rather than a child who is defying a parent’s direct instruction. If disciplining ourselves for godliness means anything, it must be relevant when we feel undisciplined.”

16. “Location (Sin as My Escape)”

“When location is our trigger for sexual sin, then sin becomes our escape. The fantasy nature of all sexual sin makes it a perfect escape from an unpleasant location. We can ‘be there’ and ‘not be there’ at the same time. We get credit for attendance (or at least avoid the discredit of absence) without having to attend. We can mentally be with our lover while enduring the boring meeting, stressful kids, uninteresting spouse, lonely apartment, or other unpleasant setting.”

“Read Psalm 32: Notice that the Psalm begins talking about an unpleasant place or time (v. 1-5). But rather than escaping, David ran to God (v. 7) and found the joy you are seeking (v. 10-11). When we escape through sexual fantasy we are using our fantasy as a substitute God. We are, in effect, praying to and meditating on our sin during a time of hardship seeking deliverance.”

17. “Negative Self-Thoughts (Sin as My Silencer)”

“When negative self-thoughts are our trigger for sin, then sin becomes our silencer. In sexual fantasy (porn, romance media, or adultery partner), we are always desired and see ourselves through the eyes of the one desiring us. We give ourselves to them not just physically but also imaginatively. Because we know the relationship is short-lived we are willing to do this. If the relationship were permanent the power of silencing-effect would be diluted over the expanse of time and contradicted by our growing number of failures in his/her presence.”

“Read Psalm 103: Sin will never do (or even a healthy human relationship) what only God can do. The ultimate ‘Peace, be still’ to our negative self-thoughts is Christ’s death on the cross – affirming that we were as bad as we thought, but replacing our deficiency with His righteousness. Sexual sin provides fantasy righteousness. It provides the kind of covering mocked in the classic children’s book *The Emperor’s New Clothes*.”

18. “Public (Sin as My Carnival)”

“When public is our trigger to sexual sin, then sin becomes our carnival.”

“We walk through life like a kid at an amusement park: gawking at every person we see like a new ride or romantic adventure, making a clownish sexual innuendo out of every comment, or treating everything present as if it existed to entertain us and stimulate us sexually. Our private thoughts of fantasy become fueled by a hyper-sexualized interpretation of our surroundings.”

“The act of looking at porn is itself part of the succor it purports to offer. I can search for women who are available to me. I can choose between them like some sovereign being. It offers a sense of control (p. 50).” Tim Chester in *Closing the Window*

“Read Romans 1:24-25: Can you hear in the description of sex as carnival what it means to have ‘exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator (v. 25)?’ God will give us over to this kind of lustful heart (v. 24). This is why a radical amputation of sin is a necessary and wise response to prevent sexual sin from becoming our carnival (Matt 5:27-30).”

19. “Weakness (Sin as My Power)”

“When weakness is our trigger to sexual sin, then sin becomes our power. The stimulation (both the physical and chemical changes associated with arousal) of sexual sin gives a façade of strength. Having another person

delight in you also provides a veneer of significance. As with most of these motives/triggers, sex becomes a means to an end. Sex is no longer an expression of love but an attempt to gain something. That is *a/ways* a recipe for dysfunctional, unsatisfying sex.”

“My pastor has preached that the primary issue in adultery is that you want someone else to worship you and serve you, to be at your beck and call. That resonated with me. I could see that theme in my fantasies (p. 15).” Anonymous testimony in David Powlison’s *Pornography: Slaying the Dragon*.

“Read 2 Corinthians 11:30: Are you willing to boast (verbally put on public display) your weakness as a way to make Christ more known and live in more authentic relationships? That is the only freedom that will allow you to enduringly enjoy what you are seeking in sexual sin.”

“If that sounds backwards to you read what Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians (1:20-25) and ask yourself if your ‘wisdom’ is getting you closer or farther from where you want to be.”

NEXT STEPS

List and rank the top five motives/triggers for your sexual sin.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

“Porn is always about a symptom of deeper issues. It’s about lust, but it’s also about anger, intimacy, control, fear, escape, and so on. Many of these problems will show up in other areas of a person’s life (p.

109).” Tim Chester in *Closing the Window*

“For some people the motive for their sexual sin will be very self-evident. Maybe you could quickly pick out the motive-triggers that deceive you into believing sin is ‘worth it’ or will ‘work out’ this time. For others, it requires reflection in the moment of temptation to discern what is luring them. If this is you, use the [journaling tool](#)* from the *False Love: Overcoming Sexual Sin from Pornography to Adultery* seminar that is designed to help you understand your motives.”

“The value in understanding the motive for our sin is that it allows us to hear to the empty promises sin makes so that we can turn to our loving Heavenly Father who is willing and able to fulfill those promises. I hope this article has helped you see the emptiness of sin so that you are prepared to embrace the fullness of God in the gospel.”

“**End Note:** If you are married, then your spouse also needs care and guidance as you work through *False Love* study. The *True Betrayal: Overcoming the Betrayal of Your Spouse’s Sexual Sin* is a complementing study for your spouse.”

“Visit BradHambrick.com for more helpful resources.”

*For journaling tool: <http://bradhambrick.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Sexual-Sin-Journal.pdf>

(Brad Hambrick, “Why Do I Continue to Struggle?!? 19 Possible Motive-Triggers for Pornography”)