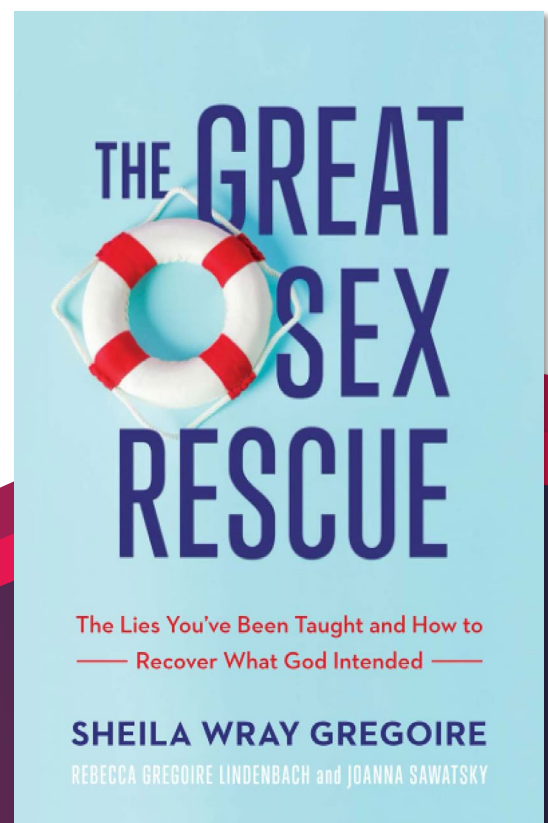


PORN

Are Wives Responsible for Keeping Their Husbands Away From Porn?

Based on a survey of 20,000 predominantly evangelical women, spanning the spectrum of theological beliefs and denominations, for our book *The Great Sex Rescue*.



BARE MARRIAGE

HEALTHY, EVIDENCE-BASED, BIBLICAL ADVICE FOR SEX & MARRIAGE

with Sheila Wray Gregoire



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IS PORN ONLY A MALE PROBLEM?

First, let's acknowledge an important fact: **both men and women use porn**. It may be more common among men, but it's not unheard of among women. You wouldn't know it from reading most popular Christian books on marriage and sex, though. In our study, **we didn't find even one that mentioned porn use by women**. (Our secular control book, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, by John Gottman, did mention it.)

How does this affect women who struggle with porn use? They may feel a deep sense of shame over their **"abnormal" problem**. Conservative Protestant women are less likely than their male counterparts to turn to pastors or counselors for help with their porn struggle.

But women are not only bearing the shame and responsibility of their own porn use—**apparently, they're also to blame for men's**.

A common teaching in Christian marriage books and seminars is that wives should have frequent intercourse with their husbands so that their husbands aren't tempted to seek sexual release in other ways, such as watching porn or even having an affair. Here are some examples:

"I think one of the reasons men are getting into trouble in this area is that that need [for sex] is not being met."

*Focus on the Family broadcast,
November 5, 2019*

"If you're married, your husband depends on you to be his partner in his battle against sexual temptation."

*Focus on the Family article,
"Sex Is a Spiritual Need"*

"The cold, hard truth is that men are often lured into affairs because they are sexually deprived at home."

Love & Respect

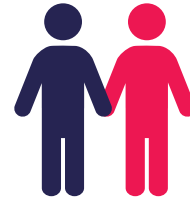
"When men aren't getting regular sexual release, their eyes are more difficult to control. Help him out in this battle. Give him release."

Every Man's Battle

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MEN'S SEXUAL PURITY?

As the quotes we referenced above illustrate, **many Christian resources on marriage place the blame for men's porn use at the feet of their wives**. The message is that if a man doesn't get enough sex, he will eventually succumb to porn, even though he doesn't want to and would prefer sex with his wife. Kevin Leman, the author of *Sheet Music*, even encourages wives to use alternatives to intercourse to give their husbands sexual release during their menstrual periods. He writes, "...faithfulness is a two-person job."

Wives whose husbands already struggle with porn addiction are told to have frequent intercourse with them to help them from falling back into old habits. Stephen Arterburn and his coauthors tell wives in *Every Man's Battle*: "Once he tells you he's going cold turkey [off of porn], be like a merciful vial of methadone for him." How dehumanizing.



WRECKING A MARRIAGE WHILE TRYING TO SAVE IT

These messages may be intended to protect marriage, but what is their actual impact? Women report worse sex if they believe they must have sex with their husbands to keep them from watching pornography, and they are less happy in marriage.

If women believe this message when they married, they are

- **19% more likely** to experience **significant sexual pain** unrelated to childbirth
- **18% more likely** to report being **disinterested** in sex
- **37% more likely** to have sex out of a **sense of obligation**
- **24% less likely** to **orgasm** reliably during sex
- **24% less likely** to be confident they will **be aroused** during sex

They are, however, **42% more likely to have sex at least twice a week**. Even though sex is worse for them, they are having it more often out of fear that their husbands will look at porn if they don't.

These authors apparently don't realize how their portrayal of men's sexual nature **destroys their wives' spirits**. Instead, they promote it as a selling feature of sex! There is no depiction of God's design for sex as an ultimate, personal knowing of each other rather than just intercourse during which **she feels like a receptacle** for her husband to orgasm into **so he won't be tempted to look at porn**. It is just accepted that men can't experience sex the way God intended. This view harms both women and men.

HOW A MAN'S PORN USE CHANGES HIS OWN SEXUALITY

Porn use does not come without consequences. Some men who have regularly used porn for a long period of time **may suffer from erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation, or delayed ejaculation**. They have become so accustomed to the stimulation of porn and masturbation that without it they are unable to maintain an erection or reach climax, or they have trained their bodies to react to sexual stimulation so quickly that they have no stamina. **Porn may seem sexy, but it can destroy arousal.**

None of these problems can be solved by a wife having more frequent sex with her husband. Sadly, though, that is the message too many women have been told by Christian authors, speakers, and sometimes even their own pastors or church leaders. **Some authors even encourage women to take sexy photos of themselves** for their husbands to look at, claiming this will keep a man's sexual interest focused on his wife instead of porn. But a wife cannot placate her husband's sexual desires if those desires have been distorted by porn. As one woman who responded to our surveys put it:

"Whenever I [sent him photos and videos], he would always want more. Finally I realized (after much heartbreak) that no matter what I did, I couldn't be the reason why he did or did not choose to use porn. I was still feeding his unhealthy addiction. He was essentially using me the same as porn, but we both felt a bit better about it since it was 'legal'—aka between just us."

Until a man chooses to take responsibility for his own actions and their consequences, there is no solution to the problem of porn in his marriage. **Nothing his wife does can solve that problem for him.**

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Some Christian authors will cite 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 to support their claim that frequent intercourse in marriage is the key to preventing sexual sin. **“Don’t deprive each other,”** they’ll say, “or else you may fall to temptation.” However, even though Paul in that passage is addressing both husbands and wives, this message seems to be aimed primarily at women.

Furthermore, later in this same book Paul writes:

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

1 Corinthians 10:13

We posit that 1 Corinthians 7 is more about sharing in one another’s burdens to help each other deal with normal temptations of life, not placate each other’s addiction. **You cannot free someone from their sin—that was Jesus’ job on the cross, not yours in the bedroom.**

Paul also writes:

“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God.”

1 Thessalonians 4:3, 5

Did you catch that? **Each of us must learn to control our own bodies!** Wives must control their own bodies, and husbands must control theirs. **Women are not responsible to keep their husbands away from porn;** that is their husbands’ duty.

WHAT RECOVERY SHOULD LOOK LIKE

If you have struggled with porn, we want you to know freedom is available in Christ.

“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”

Galatians 5:13

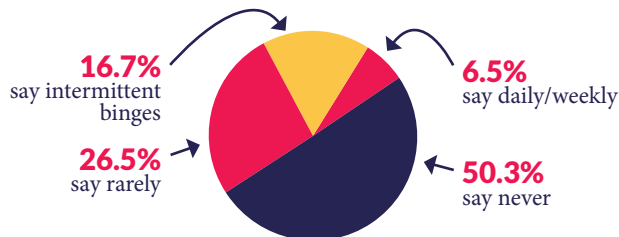
Thankfully, despite these harmful teachings that are so prevalent in evangelical Christianity, **huge numbers of marriages have been freed from porn addictions.** But this has happened mainly when the responsibility for porn use is put squarely back where it belongs: at the feet of the porn user.

After working on our blog for over a decade and hearing thousands of stories of marriages impacted by porn, we have found that two things are needed for recovery: **owning your sexual sin without justifying it** and **taking practical steps to make withstanding the temptation easier.** If someone is not justifying their sin, and they’re not being controlled by it, then healing is not only possible but probable.

SOME GOOD NEWS ABOUT PORN

In our research, we have also found some good news about porn. Contrary to the message from books like *Every Man's Battle*, our surveys found that 50.3% of married evangelical men never use porn and the 49.7% who do use it in intermittent binges or rarely.

Porn Use Among Married Evangelical Men



This is important because the message of *Every Man's Battle* makes it seem like all men constantly struggle with lust. It makes men sound so insatiable that their wives may feel like they can never really trust them. We need to make room for a more nuanced conversation about sexual sin and temptation. **Not all men constantly struggle with lust**, and even those who have given in to the temptation of porn can experience freedom and recovery.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you have struggled with porn and would like to pursue recovery, here are some resources to help you in your journey.

BOOKS

- *Surfing for God*, by Michael John Cusick
- *Unwanted*, by Jay Stringer
- *Non-Toxic Masculinity*, by Zachary Wagner
- *The Sexually Healthy Man*, by Andrew J. Bauman

ONLINE

You can also check Andrew J. Bauman's website and Facebook page for additional resources.

- andrewjbauman.com
- facebook.com/AndrewJamesBauman

RESCUING AND REFRAMING

INSTEAD OF THIS

"The reason men watch porn is because **they're not getting enough sex at home.**"

"The cold, hard truth is that men are often lured into affairs because **they are sexually deprived at home.**"

"Watching **porn is a sin.**"

Telling teenage boys: "**You are going to be tempted** by pornography."

SAY THIS!

"**It is not your spouse's responsibility** to keep you away from pornography."

"You have a responsibility to stay faithful to your spouse regardless of what is happening in the marriage. **If there are big problems in your marriage, seek help.** Do not have an affair."

"Watching porn is a sin because it contributes to the abuse of others and **reduces them to objects** to be used."

Telling both genders: "**Many people struggle with pornography** temptations, but many do not. If you do struggle, know that it is a struggle you can overcome."



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