

# Women and Pornography



by HELEN THORNE

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Liz’s life had been unremarkable. She was an ordinary student in college. She always passed her courses but never excelled. She had enjoyed a range of sports but never made the team. Now she worked as a middle manager in a middle-of-the-road store in a mid-sized town. “Little Miss Average” was the way she described herself.

Liz had a few good friends, but her social life wasn’t particularly fun. Her boyfriend of a few months was a Christian man, but he wasn’t as committed to church as she was. He stayed on the fringes while she was active in a range of behind-the-scenes roles.

If anyone had asked her, she would have said her life was “fine,” but deep down she felt desperately bored. She wanted to be swept off her feet, to experience something that went beyond the day-to-day drudgery. She wanted to feel truly alive.

She can’t remember when she first searched for porn, but she remembers well the sensations it produced. Sexual arousal, yes, but the thrill was from much more than that. She could imagine herself as the temptress, the provocateur, someone who turned people’s heads and was the center of attention—someone who made a real difference in the bedroom. Not “Little Miss Average” but, instead, a woman who people would notice and remember.

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She liked that feeling. She liked that feeling a great deal. So much so, that she was able to silence her biblical qualms about her online behavior and keep logging on for more. Soon her pornography habit became a weekly fix. She knew it wasn't what God would want. After each online binge, she felt waves of guilt and apologized to the Lord for her sin. She didn't stop watching though. She told herself she needed the confidence that porn-watching gave her to get through the mundane days in between.

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Stories like Liz's are far from rare, but often they remain untold. Congregations can be places of silence when it comes to women and porn. People can be reluctant to believe the struggles are true.

So, let me begin by asking you a question: Does Liz's tale surprise you? Do you find it hard to believe that such a "normal" woman could be engaging with explicit material online? Are you reading this thinking, "But I don't know any woman who would act like that!" Maybe you're convinced pornography is just a problem for men or an issue mainly for those who don't believe in the Christian faith.

I've been told that a lot in recent years. When I first started investigating pornography use among women, I was told I was wasting my time. Of course, everyone acknowledges there are a few broken women who indulge—a tiny minority whose faith is on the rocks—but more than that? I have been repeatedly told there are none.

But that's not true. There are considerably more than none.

Recent research indicates that about 15% of Christian women use pornography every month.<sup>1</sup> That number is slightly more encouraging than the non-Christian world where 18% log on at least once a week. Both numbers are likely to grow. Now, over 60% of girls are exposed to explicit material online before the age of eighteen. And about 50% of young women consider pornography to be an acceptable way to express their sexuality. Few say their parents prepared them to battle temptation well.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>, accessed December 4, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2013/08/30/women-addicted-to-porn-stats/>, accessed December 4, 2017.

These are sobering statistics and heart-breaking realities. Each number represents an actual woman who worships in our churches or lives down the street. These are people who need help—people who need us to point them to Christ. That’s why I’m writing these pages: to help you grasp what is true, and to help you walk alongside those who are currently struggling alone.

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### **Reality**

In the past, pornography use has been deemed a largely male preserve, featuring women exploited for the pleasure of men. In recent decades though, the balance has changed. Female directors of pornographic films have been shooting material for the specific pleasure of women. Story lines, camera angles, and traditional roles have all been tweaked to arouse and excite a female audience. Now porn sites bear advertisements targeted at women of every age, orientation, and culture. “Click-throughs” to female porn lurk on a range of popular gossip or dating sites. It has also become increasingly acceptable for younger women to upload their homemade videos—a chance for affirmation, popularity, and fame (if all goes to plan). Create a market and consumers will arrive. In communities, in churches, there is now a regular—and largely hidden—pattern of women accessing and creating explicit material online.

Yet, in the counseling room, I’ve rarely had a woman arrive asking for help with porn. Most pornography users present with anxiety, depression, discontent, or a difficulty in relationships at home or at church.

Often it doesn’t take long, however, for women to tell their stories of online sexual exploits. It happens when I ask questions such as, “Are there times when you find it particularly hard to talk to God?” or “How do you unwind at the end of a long day?” Questions like these might produce a blush, a side-ways glance, a long pause. Sometimes the woman opens up

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