



# Let's talk about... pornography

by Marcus Mak

**L**et's talk about sex, baby", are lyrics from the controversial song of the same title by American hip-hop trio Salt-N-Pepa. It was released in 1991 and was not actually about sex but the fact that sex was "a subject that nobody

wants to talk about."<sup>1</sup> Despite its controversy, it achieved great success, with number one hits in many countries.

Let's talk about a related subject, one that is also financially successful and has billions of online hits each year. It, too, is a subject that nobody wants to talk about. In fact, in my 38 years

of life, it has never been talked about by any teacher or medical professional, by my parents, or any other significant adult in my life.

Why are they avoiding an issue that has already become a toxic global epidemic? Why are they seemingly ignoring a question that members of the UK Parliament

say should be treated as a public health hazard?<sup>2</sup> It is an activity millions are engrossed in, but few are actively discussing its dangers.

It's time we did. So, let's talk about pornography.

Pornography is hugely successful because it is highly pleasurable. It entices people to tap into one of the strongest forces known to humankind: our sexual desire.

People are, by nature, hedonistic. We make decisions based on what will bring us the most pleasure. We are, at our core, a pleasure seeking and loving people. Ask yourself this question: why do you do what you choose to do, even if you do not like it? Pleasure will be at the root of every answer. If you hate your job for example, you still do it for a paycheck every month, which allows you to buy and experience the things you enjoy. Everything we choose to do is a means to pleasure.

But what if this particular pleasure is doing you and the world more harm than you could ever imagine—would you still do it? What if this unreal fantasy, this little bit of fun, is ruining relationships between men and women? Would you still do it?

The harmful effects of pornography are well documented. We aren't able to cover every detail in this short article, but here are just a couple of examples:

- Pornography damages your mental health. Brains that have

been saturated with pornographic images have their arousal pathways rewired. The neurotransmitter dopamine is responsible for giving you a feeling of exciting pleasure, which porn triggers.<sup>3</sup> The more pornography a person watches, the greater the stimulation required to reach the same level of excitement. This means that over time, the regular viewing of hard-core adult porn begins to lose its attractiveness and appeal. The brain needs newer and more exciting images to enable production of dopamine at the same level. This can lead a person to consume more extreme forms of porn such as violence, rape, incest, bestiality, and potentially, child pornography. It is a risky, downward, dehumanising spiral.

- Pornography negatively impacts romantic relationships. Men, so saturated with images of porn, want to act out the images and scenes lodged in their minds; women can start to believe they have to become like porn actresses in order to please their partners. These effects lead us to act in ways we never intended: using others for our own sexual pleasure and gratification. Pornography doesn't teach you about genuine, selfless, mutual love making, it can only show you how to use others purely for your own selfish pleasure. Yet, according to the BBC,<sup>4</sup> it is the main source of sex education for many young people.

Looking back on my younger life, I am now able to see that I was trapped by pornography, caught

in a cycle of addiction, too easily pleased by images of others having sex, but always left yearning for something else. I didn't realise it at the time, but there was something else, something infinitely more satisfying out there. And it turns out it could completely satisfy me—mind, body, heart, and soul.

My hunger for that unknown more, a spiritual hunger you could call it, led me to search other paths, other ways of fulfilling what was missing in my life. It drove me to read the Bible and return to church, hoping that Jesus would have the answer. He not only had the answer, he was the answer. Over time, I began to learn and actually experience the reality of who I was and why God made me. He made me for pleasure: his pleasure and mine. I was made to delight in and enjoy God in a loving and life-giving relationship. As I grew in my friendship with God, slowly but surely the pull and power of pornography lost its grip and appeal. He helped me to fight this new and most iniquitous drug, freed me from the chains of addiction, and showed me what true fulfilment really was.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/salt-n-pepaour-life-in-15-songs-111537/lets-talk-about-sex-1991-119673/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/parliament-pornpublic-health-hazard/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/10441027/How-porn-is-rewiring-our-brains.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/bb79a2ce-0de4-4965-98f0-9ebbcfcc2a60>

# Where to get help:

If you're struggling with porn, a number of helpful resources are available at

<https://www.dia.govt.nz/Youth-and-porn-resources>

The Light Project is a charitable trust founded in 2017 by a small team of sexual and public health experts. The project is a pilot project that aims to help youth, their whānau, schools, and wider communities to positively navigate the new porn landscape in New Zealand. They are keen to hear from anyone needing help, and can be found at

<https://thelightproject.co.nz>