

A Healing Journey out of Porn Addiction and Same Sex Attraction

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As we begin the year 2014, I look back and realize how 2013 was a true turning point in my life. It was the year when I finally determined to put an end to a certain misery I had actually grown quite attached to: porn addiction. It was also the year when I realized that I probably would never be able to conquer my addiction on my own.

By nature, I am a very independent person. I like my space, and I like to do things my own way. I like to have freedom of choice. Yet, my perception of “freedom of choice” is what inevitably led me into my comfortable misery; a place of secret sadness and longing whose origins I didn’t understand, but a place I found I could escape—if only temporarily—through the euphoric pleasure of sexual activity.

Don’t get me wrong, my addiction (fortunately) never dominated by life. I was still able to work a job, raise a family, and do most all the other things that the Average Joe might do. However, the urges of my addiction were never far beneath the surface, and I would often feel compelled to arrange my daily schedule so that I could squeeze in some “free time” along the way for looking at porn and masturbating. Oddly enough, it seemed like whatever amount of time I allowed myself for indulging in porn, it was never enough. Once the internet came along, there was an endless supply of porn available and I would sometimes lose myself for hours, just surfing from one image to the next; from one phallic adrenaline rush to the next. Too often, scheduling time for my addiction was problematic. Family responsibilities or work would intrude and demand more of my time. My porn viewing would get eclipsed, and my natural response was to get angry; angry that I couldn’t find enough “porn freedom.” So, this balancing act—between family, work and porn—became my comfortable misery; a porn addiction integrated into my day-to-day life so seamlessly that I was able to have the best of all worlds. Or so I thought.

My addiction to porn started about a dozen years before my marriage, around the age of 16. I remember a friend of mine bringing something to high school one day that looked like a key chain. There was an object attached to the chain that looked sort of like a small flash light. However, when you held it up to the light and looked through it, you could see a bright image of a man’s penis ejaculating onto a woman’s face. The image was only visible if you held it up to the light and only visible to the person looking at it (i.e., no one else nearby would know what you were looking at). This secretive porn viewing provided an automatic rush; being able to privately see another man’s penis ejaculating was an incredible experience for me. Up to that point, the only penis I had ever seen was my own. I had never had experiences as a boy that, perhaps, would have allowed me to feel comfortable with my body—to allow me to feel part of

the tribe of men. I never remember changing clothes around other males, and if I did it would probably have been under the strictest conditions of privacy (where everyone would do their best to discreetly hide their genitals). As a child or teenager, I was never in a shower area where other men might naturally be in varying stages of undress. My childhood experiences, when it came to nudity, were pretty puritanical. Everything having to do with sexuality was hidden and forbidden in our home—even among those of the same gender.

From my latter teens into my early and middle 20s I engaged in an avid search for the naked male body—through magazines, movies, anything I could find. When I moved away to college I found the town there to be very porn-friendly. I saw my first Torso magazine at one of the quickie marts right near the edge of campus. I could hardly believe it—a magazine featuring men sporting erections on nearly every page—and for public sale at a convenience store. I felt my porn addiction suddenly validated in the local atmosphere of the highly educated.

Feeling a strong attraction to male porn during my early adult years, I inevitably determined that I must be gay. I started going to gay bars and finding easy hook-ups with other men. All of this was an addictive rush: sex, and more sex, men and more men. I eventually moved in with another guy, lived for a while in an intimate relationship with him, and finally determined that I needed to return to my hometown and “come out” to my family. Needless to say, it was a horrible experience. Almost every member of my family was devastated and several lashed out in anger. As odd as it may sound, this point of “coming out”—and honestly revealing myself to my family—was, in a strange way, the start of my “coming out” of my addiction. However, I still had a long, long way to go.

A short while after informing my family of my same sex attractions (SSA), a fateful irony developed in my life. I fell in love (or lust) with one of the most beautiful women I had ever met. Since she was married at the time, it was an adulterous affair and one that would burn hot for only a short while. Setting the moral aspects of the affair aside, I was faced with even more difficult questions regarding my sexuality. Here I was, having a wonderfully hot (and illicit) affair with a woman, while living in an intimate relationship with another man, and reveling in gay porn. “Good gosh!” I thought, “what kind of multi-horned monster am I?”

Over the next few years, I determined that I wanted to eventually get married (yes, to a woman) and raise a family. That was where my heart was, even though I felt like my brain hadn’t fully caught up with it yet. For, you see, even though I was no longer living as a gay man and looking for sex with men, I was still strongly attracted to male/gay porn. Even though I tried to relegate my porn addiction to the smallest possible part of my life, it remained a compulsive habit; an addiction that I could not break.

In 1988, God brought the most wonderful woman into my life—or, I should say, back into my

life. It had been ten years since my graduation from high school, and I had traveled down a lot—and I do mean a lot—of roads since then. Yet, in December 1988, shortly before Christmas, I became reacquainted with a high school classmate; not just any classmate, mind you, but the one I had actually attended the senior prom with. We met for dinner and comfortably struck up a conversation just like we were still back in high school. As our dates continued, we talked about what had happened in our lives during the previous ten years. She told me about the boyfriends she had dated, and—ironically—I eventually told her of the boyfriends that I had dated (most notably the one I had lived with for several years). I also told her about the adulterous affair that I had been involved in. I told her that even though I had previously lived a gay lifestyle, my life had changed in a profound way and I knew at that point that I wanted to move forward as a heterosexual, get married and raise a family. That was my dream. I confessed to her that I still had some SSA issues that I was dealing with, and that I didn't know how long those "issues" would remain. I remember telling her my thoughts about sexuality and defining it as a spectrum—running all the way from a "constitutional homosexual" (someone who can't imagine doing anything heterosexual) to a "constitutional heterosexual" (someone who can't imagine doing anything homosexual). It was my feeling that I had moved solidly past the "center point" on that spectrum, toward the heterosexual side, but knew that—for whatever reason—I was still vulnerable to SSA. I didn't tell her that one of the main facets of SSA to which I was most vulnerable was gay porn. I realize now how horribly unfair and dishonest it was for me to omit that fact during our conversations, but it was a "comfortable misery" I thought I could keep hidden. My naivety regarding the powerful urges attached to my addiction bordered on absurd. My wife's naivety was nothing more than blind love. How could she have known about something I was working so desperately to conceal?

Prior to our marriage, my wife and I were very honest about our sexual histories. In fact, we both agreed to be tested for HIV just so we could be assured that there were no surprises lurking behind the curtain. It was the first such test for both of us and I was petrified, knowing the number of sexual encounters I had had in the past. There was tremendous relief when the lab results came back as "negative."

It wasn't long after our marriage that my wife became aware of my porn addiction, and the two of us lived with/tolerated it for the next 24 years of our marriage. When I told my wife that I just didn't think I would ever be able to conquer my porn habit, she lovingly agreed to give me my "porn space," where I could live out my sexual fantasies. She was clearly acting out of love (and a lack of viable alternatives), but I was acting out of complete selfishness. There were a number of times during those 24 years when she encouraged me to seek help, but I ignored her every plea. I figured if a person looked at my life, minus the porn habit, he or she would have to admit that, overall, I was a pretty good guy. This was my defense for continuing to protect my comfortable misery. I arrogantly felt that my wife actually owed it to me to provide me my space where I could enjoy my porn and feed my addiction. I assured her that even though I didn't think

I would ever be able to overcome my porn addiction, I would otherwise remain faithful and true to her. I also promised to try and limit my porn addiction (that is, repress it rather than transform myself) and, most importantly, to try and keep it hidden from our 5 children.

I hate to admit that part of my pathology was collecting male porn images. Over a period of about 10 years, I collected dozens of CDs of porn that I had downloaded from the internet, various jpegs, avis, and mpgs--probably, all in all, thousands of images of men. I kept the CDs stored in a secret place in lock boxes. Since I rarely went to the lock boxes to look at any of the "old" CDs, I wondered why I felt the need to save them all. Yet, I couldn't ever conceive of the idea of getting rid of it all.

However, something miraculous happened during 2013. In May, 2013 I finally took action and did something I swore I would never do—I saw a therapist. Between May and September, my therapist helped me to understand why I was addicted to porn and how the addiction reflected my need for safe intimacy with men--something I apparently needed when I was a child, but never got. My father had died when I was only twelve years old—just before I entered puberty—and even when he was alive he seemed very distant to me. I really don't remember any one-on-one times that we spent together, just enjoying one another's company. In fact, when he wasn't working, he was often gone from the house altogether. My only brother was six years older than me, and he spent most of his time with friends of his own age. As children, we were never very close. As a result, and partly by default, I ended up developing my closest family relationships with my Mom and two sisters.

My therapist helped me understand the psychological underpinnings of my addiction, and taught me how to start recognizing some of the core emotions I had buried during my childhood—namely, sadness and anger. He pointed me toward something that would, in the end, change my life forever. He recommended that I attend a “people can change” weekend in the fall of 2013. I decided to take the plunge. It was called Journey into Manhood (JiM) and for the first time in my life I began developing a gender congruity between my view of men and masculinity (my concept of gender) and my view of myself as a man (my concept of self.) As I have come to realize, the greater these two concepts overlapped, the more I felt my internal sense of masculinity. This internalized sense of masculinity, in combination with my ability to authentically bond with actual men, rather than to create vicarious (and false) fantasies using images of men, provided me with the safe intimacy (noted by my therapist) that I had longed for since childhood.

During the week of preparation for the JiM weekend, my porn habits took a back seat. I found out that several other men from Tennessee and surrounding states were planning on attending the weekend. So, I took a risk and emailed them to see if any of us could easily carpool. That's when I met Josh and Stan, and began sharing with them about my struggles with SSA and my porn

addiction. A curious thing happened during that week. As I emailed Josh and Stan and made my plans to attend the JiM weekend, I didn't seem to have any interest in watching porn. I seemed to have lost interest in a behavior that had been a major part of my life. That was really an odd experience for someone who had been addicted to male/gay porn for so many years.

Moreover, after my experiences at the retreat, I returned home with a complete lack of interest in searching for porn of any type, internet or otherwise. I realized that, for some reason, I wasn't craving my porn "fix" any more. I began to internalize a new reality: I was able to have authentic masculine bonding with real people, and no longer needed to substitute the fantasy of masculine imagery. And, for the first time ever, I seriously considered getting rid of all those CDs I had stockpiled.

I also decided to reinforce my bonding with other men by attending my Church's Celebrate Recovery support group for sex addicts. During the very first meeting, I told the group about my stockpiled porn and asked if any of the men there would be willing to help me destroy those CDs. Three men rushed up to me after the meeting and told me they would help.

My "freedom party"—as I came to call it--was held at one of the men's homes. I brought sub sandwiches and soft drinks, along with a heavy duty shredder, and my three lock boxes full of porn CDs. Stan, my newfound buddy who I met while car pooling to the JiM weekend, also came up from southern Tennessee (bless his heart!) and joined the other three men in helping to free me from my porn prison. After an hour or so of shredding, I was finally free!!

When all was said and done, I took a photo of the shredder, two of the three empty lock boxes and the little gold box that had held the keys to my secret porn stash. Freedom has many faces, but for me that day it was the empty lock boxes, open for all to see, and a shredder filled with something I no longer wanted.

I have been clean and sober for nearly four months now. I haven't looked at porn since that week before the September JiM retreat. Oddly enough, I don't even have a craving for it anymore. While I really can't explain why I no longer crave the porn, I just don't. However, I believe it is because I have finally met my core needs in a healthy way, bonding in a healthy way with other men, and feeling good about myself as a man, rather than meeting these needs in unhealthy ways like fantasizing over masculine images. I am both humbled and proud to tell you that just a short time ago, on January 20th, I received my 90-days-sober chip at Celebrate Recovery. I cannot think of a 3 month period in my adult life, prior to this one, when I did not desire and actively search for pornography. What a miracle!

All of the above success is not to say that I would not be vulnerable if somebody came in and

switched a porn movie onto my TV while I was watching it, or laid out a bunch of glossy porn photos in front of me. However, the big difference is, I don't feel the compulsion to go get the stuff or to download it off the computer. Will that lack of compulsion last? I hope and pray it will. How long will it last? I have no idea but I hope and pray that if I continue feeling good about myself and authentically bonding in a healthy way with other men, it will last a lifetime. In the meantime, I am thankful for every day that passes without the claws of addiction controlling my life. Living honestly is a wonderful thing. It is something I thought I had lost in childhood.

My addiction proved harmful to those around me, by stealing my time and making me resentful and angry toward anyone who got in my way and prevented me from "feeding the beast." Now that a major psychological wound from childhood has been healed, I share a much greater intimacy with my wife and children. The old angers that had once centered around my addiction are now gone. In addition, the ghosts of shame and deceit no longer haunt the bedroom and I now share a fully honest sexual intimacy with my wife that is wonderfully comfortable and exciting.

I am thoroughly enjoying the experience of living honestly in the comfort of my "freedom meadow." It is a place I now happily share with my wife and children, and with a safe community of men with whom I can enjoy authentic friendship and brotherhood.

I pray that my story may touch the lives of those who seek help and who likewise have felt imprisoned by their own addictions. I also hope that those who read it may experience their own "freedom meadow" and find the great joys that spring from choosing to live an honest life.