



Men, Time to Wake Up

Pornography, Ideological Capture, and
the Courage to Protect Our Children

Jeffrey E. Hansen, PhD

A Consuming Fire

The Heartache of an Old Psychologist

I write these words as an old psychologist whose heart aches. For more than four decades, I have sat with children, adolescents, parents, soldiers, pastors, professionals, and families carrying pain they could scarcely name. I have watched children struggle to understand burdens placed upon them far too early. I have watched men lose their freedom, their marriages, their ministries, and sometimes their desire to live. I have watched women wonder why they were not enough, children inherit secrets they never created, and families fracture beneath the weight of concealed compulsions.

My heart aches for the boy whose first exposure to pornography occurred before he possessed the maturity to understand what he was seeing. It aches for the adolescent whose developing brain became conditioned to seek increasingly intense images. It aches for the man who loves his wife and children but has built a hidden life he no longer knows how to escape. It aches for the wife who experiences pornography as betrayal, for the child who discovers a parent's secret, and for the young person whose natural questions about the body and identity are answered by strangers, algorithms, political activists, and an industry eager to create another consumer.

I have spent much of my professional life in what I sometimes call the sandbox of human development, watching children play, imagine, form relationships, test boundaries, work through conflict, and gradually discover who they are. Children need time in that sandbox. They need safety, wonder, movement, family, scraped knees, trusted adults, and the freedom to grow without being recruited into adult appetites or political causes. When I see childhood invaded by explicit material and ideological demands, I do not experience that merely as an intellectual disagreement. I experience it as grief.

That grief is why this essay must cover considerable ground. At first glance, pornography addiction, smartphones, school libraries, sex education, gender ideology, professional psychology, queer theory, neo Marxism, family, and faith may appear to be too many subjects for one essay. I do not believe they can be understood honestly in isolation. They converge around one central question: Who will shape a child's understanding of the body, sexuality, identity, intimacy, and what it means to be human?

Pornography did not flourish in a cultural vacuum. It flourished within a broader cultural movement that increasingly separated sexuality from embodiment, covenant, developmental maturity, family, and moral responsibility. At the same time, powerful technologies placed explicit material within immediate reach, educational institutions began introducing adult sexual concepts at younger ages, and professional organizations increasingly treated contested ideological claims as settled science.

I am not suggesting that every teacher, psychologist, physician, librarian, or parent consciously intends to harm children. Many are compassionate people who sincerely believe they are helping. But sincerity does not protect us from error, and good intentions do not eliminate consequences. We must be willing to examine where these ideas originated, how they entered our institutions, what they teach children, and whether the promised benefits are supported by developmental science and long term outcomes.

The problem is not merely one explicit website, one illustrated book, one smartphone, one classroom lesson, or one professional organization. These are interconnected parts of a much larger struggle over childhood, sexuality, family, truth, and the meaning of the human person. If we address only the visible symptoms while refusing to examine the ideas and institutions beneath them, we will never understand how we arrived here, and we will not know how to find our way home.

Before I Speak About Other Men

Before I say another word about what pornography has done to other men, I need to tell the truth about myself. I was part of it too.

Thank God this was before smartphones placed limitless pornography in every pocket. When I was a boy and young man, magazines were a primary means of exposure, especially during adolescence. That was how pornography entered my life, and I carried some of it into the early years of my marriage.

Then my wife discovered it. She did not respond gently or ambiguously. Her answer was essentially, "No. Hell no. This is not what our marriage is going to be about." Thank God she had that strength. She made it unmistakably clear that she would not participate in genuine intimacy with me while I was also making private sorties into pornography. I could not have both. I had a choice to make about my marriage, my integrity, and the kind of man I intended to become.

I chose my wife and my marriage. I sought counseling, confronted the behavior, and stopped. Thank God for a wife who loved me enough to draw that boundary, for a counselor who helped me, and for a God whose grace was with me. Scripture promises that when we confess, God is faithful to forgive and cleanse us. That is not permission to minimize sin. It is an invitation to stop hiding and come into the light.

I share this because I refuse to pretend that pornography has affected only other people. I know its pull, the secrecy that accompanies it, and the ease with which a person can rationalize what he is doing. I also

know that a man can make a different choice. My history is not a reason to remain silent. It is one of the reasons I must speak.

What I Have Learned as a Psychologist

My personal experience is only one part of why I am speaking. I have written books and chapters about pornography addiction. I have lectured on it, and I have treated men with serious substance addictions in residential treatment facilities. Again and again, after these men began trusting me, they would come privately and say, "Doc, I have another problem." That problem was pornography.

They begged for groups, education, and practical help. They understood something treatment systems sometimes overlook. A person may stop using drugs or alcohol, but if compulsive sexual behavior and other behavioral addictions remain untreated, recovery can remain dangerously vulnerable. Pornography can become another means of escape, another way to regulate distress, avoid pain, and obtain an artificial reward. If the underlying wounds, shame, loneliness, and compulsive patterns remain untouched, the person may remain vulnerable to relapse.

Pornography puts its spines into every dimension of life. It affects the brain, relationships, sexuality, marriage, integrity, faith, and connection with God. It trains people to conceal and compartmentalize. It creates a divided life, one part presented to the world and another hidden in darkness.

I have witnessed consequences at their most horrifying. I have evaluated boys barely into adolescence who sexually assaulted, or attempted to sexually assault, much younger children. I have encountered teenagers who developed elaborate plans to isolate and attack girls or women. I have known young men who left treatment before their compulsive pornography use and broader disturbance were adequately addressed, then committed terrible crimes that could cost them decades of freedom.

Pornography does not absolve anyone of responsibility, and I do not claim that it alone explains every act of sexual violence. Human behavior is more complicated. But in some of the most disturbing cases I have encountered, compulsive pornography use was deeply embedded in the person's history and distorted sexual world. I have also seen soldiers, professionals, fathers, mothers, pastors, and adolescents whose sexual preoccupation became part of a much larger pattern of deception, exploitation, violence, family destruction, or despair.

The identifying details of clinical cases must remain protected, but the pattern cannot be hidden. I have seen families in which a father's pornography use spread devastation across generations. Sons discovered the material and developed compulsive patterns of their own. I have seen respected people maintain a religious or professional appearance while a hidden sexual life hollowed them out. I have seen women devastated by men whose understanding of intimacy, masculinity, femininity, and normal relationships had been shaped by an endless digital catalogue of manufactured bodies and degrading acts.

The Industry Knows How to Capture Attention

When I speak to groups about pornography, I see men and women squirm. The room becomes uncomfortable because nearly everyone knows somebody whose life has been touched by it. Many are carrying the secret themselves. The exact percentages vary according to the study and the definitions

used, but no honest observer can deny the scale of the problem. Pornography reaches men, women, teenagers, pastors, professionals, military personnel, and children.

The consequences are not limited to religious concerns. Compulsive use can be associated with damaged relationships, diminished sexual satisfaction, loss of interest in real intimacy, unrealistic expectations, escalating content, and sexual dysfunction in some young men. The emotional, relational, spiritual, social, and economic costs extend far beyond the person looking at the screen. Spouses, children, workplaces, congregations, and communities absorb the damage.

Behind this stands an enormously profitable industry. Gail Dines has written forcefully about an industry that understands how to capture attention, escalate consumption, and convert degradation into revenue. Young women and men can be drawn into producing material whose consequences may follow them throughout their lives. Children and adolescents become future consumers. The industry collects the profits while individuals and families bear the cost.

Voices such as Matt Fradd, the late Gary Wilson, and Dr. Ted Roberts, founder of Pure Desire Ministries, have tried to awaken the public and offer pathways toward freedom. Their work exists because the need is enormous. We need more treatment, more honest churches, more informed parents, and more clinicians who are willing to address the problem directly.

Our Children Are Not Miniature Adults

Before we can rescue adults from pornography, we must wake up as parents and educators. Children deserve the freedom to move gradually and gracefully through development. They first recognize that boys and girls are different. They then begin to understand that these differences remain stable over time. Eventually, they grasp that being male or female does not change merely because clothing, interests, activities, or preferences change.

Psychiatrist Dr. Miriam Grossman has warned about premature sexualization for years, including in her book *You're Teaching My Child What?* Her essential point is one we desperately need to recover: children are not miniature adults. Their innocence is not ignorance. It is a necessary protection that allows healthy development to unfold in its proper season.

Yet children are being exposed to explicit sexual material and complicated adult ideologies before they are developmentally prepared to process them. Some books placed in school libraries contain illustrations and instructions so graphic that many adults would be shocked to see them displayed at a public meeting. The fact that something is artistically illustrated does not make it developmentally appropriate. Calling it education does not remove its psychological impact.

Children are sometimes given answers to intimate questions before they have even had the opportunity to form the questions. They are told that their bodies may not reveal who they truly are and that identity can be separated from biological reality. Instead of allowing identity to unfold within stable relationships, embodiment, maturation, and healthy development, adults place political and ideological conflict directly upon the shoulders of children.

When we introduce adult sexual concepts too early, we do not necessarily enlighten children. We may burden them. We can create confusion where there was simplicity and anxiety where there was security. Psalm 139 speaks of being fearfully and wonderfully made. A child needs adults who help him or her inhabit that created body with gratitude and confidence, not adults who encourage suspicion toward it.

What My Own Profession Has Failed to Do

I say this with grief because psychology is my profession. I have spent my career as a clinical psychologist, including years of work in pediatric and adolescent psychology. Too much of my discipline has sold out to ideology because too many professionals have failed to do their homework. They repeat approved language, follow professional fashion, and treat contested political claims as settled science.

Psychologists should know developmental psychology. They should understand attachment, affect regulation, identity formation, neurodevelopment, trauma, family systems, and the profound influence of relationships upon the developing brain. They should study the work of Allan Schore and others who have helped us understand how the child's mind and nervous system develop within attachment relationships. They should approach irreversible decisions with humility, caution, and respect for developmental time.

Instead, too many clinicians and professional organizations have followed the ideology first and searched for supporting language afterward. In my judgment, this includes influential portions of the American Psychological Association. That is not science at its best. Science begins with questions, welcomes disagreement, examines competing explanations, studies long term outcomes, and changes course when evidence demands it. Ideology begins with a conclusion and punishes those who question it.

I am not an intellectual giant, but I can read. I can study. I can put ideas together, and I can recognize patterns. I have studied neo Marxism in considerable depth. I have written chapters about it and lectured on it. I see a pattern of ideological capture, first of language and institutions, then of professional organizations and educational systems, and finally of children themselves.

My anger is not directed toward the confused child, the frightened parent, or the adult struggling to make sense of his or her life. They deserve compassion and careful care. My anger is directed toward an ideological system that treats children as instruments of social transformation, and toward adults who know, or ought to know, that children require protection, developmental time, parental involvement, and humility from professionals.

The Ideological Capture of Childhood

I believe this is ideological capture. I do not use that phrase casually. Neo-Marxist thought shifted the revolutionary struggle from economic class alone toward culture, identity, language, sexuality, institutions, and the family. Queer theory then challenged stable categories of sex, gender, normality, and moral order. Michel Foucault and Judith Butler became central intellectual influences in this project, and their ideas now echo through universities, professional organizations, teacher training, clinical language, school curricula, and children's media.

I reject this ideology. I condemn what it does to children. I reject the belief that the child's body is merely raw material for self-invention, that every inherited boundary is oppressive, or that liberation requires dismantling the natural family and the meaning of male and female. I reject the practice of placing adult sexual concepts before children and calling anyone who objects hateful or ignorant.

This capture does not require every participant to sit in one room and plan a conspiracy. Ideological capture occurs when a worldview gains control of the language, institutions, incentives, professional standards, and allowable questions. People then advance the system because conformity is rewarded and dissent carries a cost. Whatever individual educators may intend, the institutional pattern is real, and children are carrying the consequences.

Stand down, Michel Foucault. Stand down, Judith Butler. Our children do not belong to an ideology. They are not instruments for dismantling the family or conducting social experiments. They are human beings made in the image of God, and they deserve protection while their minds, bodies, identities, and consciences develop.

Educators and clinicians who knowingly bypass parents, disregard development, or place explicit material before children should be held accountable. Good intentions do not erase foreseeable harm. Professional credentials do not confer moral infallibility. If you work with children, do your homework. Learn developmental psychology. Learn attachment and neurodevelopment. Listen to pediatric and adolescent specialists. Respect parents. Honor the child's body. Protect the child's innocence.

The Great Reversal

Jonathan Haidt describes a great reversal in *The Anxious Generation*. We have become excessively protective of children in the physical world while leaving them dangerously unprotected in the digital world. We are afraid to let children ride bicycles, climb trees, take reasonable risks, fall down, scrape their knees, and learn about gravity. At the same time, we place smartphones in their hands and grant them private access to some of the most psychologically powerful and sexually exploitative material ever created.

There is too little healthy risk in the real world and far too much exposure to danger in the digital world. We have restricted experiences that help children grow while removing boundaries that once protected their innocence. We are not designed for this. Our children are not designed for this, and neither are adults.

For many boys, early exposure becomes a doorway into years of compulsive pornography use. What begins as curiosity in adolescence can become an appetite that follows a man into college, marriage, fatherhood, ministry, military service, professional life, and old age. The images change and the technology becomes more sophisticated, but the bondage remains. Parents must stop treating unrestricted smartphones as a childhood entitlement. Privacy is not the same as secrecy, and loving supervision is not oppression.

The Church Must Wake Up Too

Christian communities must stop pretending that the surrounding culture has not entered the church. We have become banal and permissive about sexuality. We dismiss cohabitation, sexual compromise, and occasional pornography as though God's design were merely an antiquated suggestion. We cannot preach fidelity while ignoring pornography, talk about protecting marriage while refusing to confront what hollows marriage out from within, or preach purity and then respond with humiliation when someone finally finds the courage to ask for help.

Silence gives pornography room to grow, while shame drives it further underground. Churches need truth, accountability, compassion, and genuine pathways to recovery. Men and women need places where they can speak honestly, receive practical help, understand the wounds and emotional needs beneath the behavior, and be held accountable without being treated as disgusting or irredeemable.

Galatians instructs believers to restore a person gently while watching themselves. That is the balance: truth without cruelty, compassion without permissiveness, and accountability without self-righteousness. The person is not the enemy. The bondage is the enemy. The industry that cultivates the bondage is the enemy. The ideology that removes protective boundaries from children is the enemy.

There Is a Way Out

That is why I do not condemn the men and women who bring this struggle to me. I do not humiliate them or treat them as disgusting, hopeless, or beyond redemption. I help them. I love them. I tell them the truth, and I show them that there is a way out.

Freedom requires honesty. It may require counseling, accountability, spiritual direction, recovery groups, changes in technology, and firm boundaries within a marriage. It requires understanding the emotional states and wounds that trigger the behavior. It requires learning to tolerate loneliness, stress, rejection, boredom, and shame without escaping into a screen. It also requires rebuilding the capacity for genuine intimacy with a real person who possesses a body, a soul, needs, limits, and dignity.

Jesus said that the truth will set us free. Truth is not a weapon for beating wounded people. It is light that exposes what has been hidden and makes a new life possible. Freedom is possible. Healing is possible. Integrity can be restored, marriages can be rebuilt, and minds can be renewed. But recovery begins when we stop rationalizing, step into the light, and tell the truth.

Time to Wake Up

It begins when parents protect their children from premature sexual exposure and refuse to provide unrestricted smartphones and private internet access. It begins when educators recognize that explicit material does not become appropriate merely because it appears in an illustrated book. It begins when clinicians recover humility and developmental wisdom. It begins when professional organizations permit genuine scientific debate instead of enforcing ideological conformity.

It begins when churches replace silence and shame with truth, accountability, compassion, and meaningful help. It begins when men step into the light and ask for help. It begins when women are

Men, Time to Wake Up
-Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.

supported and heard rather than expected to remain silent about the devastation pornography has brought into their relationships.

Men, how many more of us must be taken? How many more good men must live divided lives, appearing strong and faithful on the outside while secretly feeding something that is hollowing them out from within? This is not a message of condemnation toward the person who is struggling. It is a call to courage. It is time to protect our children, reclaim our minds, honor the women and men in our lives, restore our families, and become the people God created us to be.

Wake up, men. Wake up, women. Wake up, parents and teachers. Wake up, pastors and churches. Wake up, psychologists and physicians. Wake up, governors and leaders. Wake up, nation.

The future of our children depends upon it. The future of our families depends upon it. The spiritual and moral future of our country depends upon it. The fire is already burning. It is time for good men and women to stop pretending they cannot see the smoke.