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**M-47**

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## Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a brief on Motion M-47.

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Paul Lavergne and I am a therapist in private practice. I have a Masters Degree in Counselling Psychology and am a certified Sexual Recovery Therapist with the American Association of Sex Addiction Therapists. I have been involved in researching, reading, learning and teaching on the subject of pornography and the impact on our culture for the last 10 years. I have presented at seminars, workshops and high schools. Many of the clients I counsel have been impacted by their exposure to and use of online hard core pornography. I wish to provide my perspective on working on the front lines with those whose lives have been impacted by pornography and pass my experience and insights along to the Standing Health Committee so they may be able to make an informed and responsible decision on Motion M-47 and provide recommendations that will uphold the integrity of marriages and families and safeguard the mental and emotional health of men, women and children in Canada. I realize others who are submitting briefs may be able to provide references to research and scientific data, and there is now an abundance of research on the topic; however, as a mental health care provider I wish to offer my perspective as someone who deals with real people and real situations in my day-to-day practice.

## The Reality of Pornography Addiction

It is a self-evident fact that at no other time in human history have so many people had so much access to so much unfiltered, unregulated, uncensored hard core sexual imagery and material. Last year on Pornhub alone, people watched 97 TRILLION VIDEOS. That is 5,271 CENTURIES worth of porn. This is being called the “Great Social Experiment” and we have not yet realized the long term impact of this as a culture. Because of the ease of access, anonymity and affordability of online porn it is creating a generation of addicts, a process often starting in childhood.

## Why Pornography Should be Treated Like Tobacco or Heroin

Pornography addiction is real and it is epidemic right now. It is critical to understand the physiological basis of porn addiction and how it impacts the human brain. Many, many articles and books have been written on this: three I would recommend are “The Brain That Changes Itself” by Norman Doidge, M.D. as well as “Wired For Intimacy: How Porn Hijacks The Male Brain” by William M. Struthers and “The Drug of The New Millenium: The Brain Science Behind Pornography use” by Mark Kastleman. There is an abundance of hard scientific data in these books.

## What I Mean When I Say “Addiction”

In a nutshell, viewing sexual images releases dopamine, endorphins and several other chemicals in the brain – these then flood the “reward centre” of the brain and create a feeling of pleasure and hence provide what psychologists call a “positive reinforcement” making it more likely that the behaviour will be repeated.

These are the same neuropathways that are activated when a person ingests heroin, cocaine, crystal meth, or even smokes a cigarette. Over time the neuropathways in a person's brain are literally changed. In fact brain scans have been done on both heroin addicts and porn addicts and they show similar changes in brain structure. This leads to a pattern of addictive behaviour with the following criteria: a person is unable to stop this behaviour despite repeated attempts to do so; they continue in this behaviour despite negative consequences; they experience cravings and obsessive thoughts; they experience tolerance, meaning they need harder and harder porn or a longer time viewing porn to get the same result; they spend more and more time planning, using, and recovering from using pornography; they experience withdrawal, either mentally or physiologically, when they cannot engage in the behaviour.

I compare the modern delivery system for this drug to drinking from an eye-dropper (pre-Internet) to drinking from a fire hose (modern day).

The effects I mentioned on individuals – that it turns a normal person into an addict, should be cause for great alarm, and inspire us to take a public health model approach to this issue. I am often asked if everyone that views pornography is an “addict”, and the answer of course is no. However latest polls tell us 51% of all Americans seek out porn “at least occasionally” (The Porn Phenomenon, Barna Group, 2016). Canadian statistics mirror those of the studies done in America. The fact is that many who view porn only occasionally are putting themselves at risk of developing a full-blown addiction over time. Many of these are children and teenagers whose brains are still developing and exposure to online porn can have a profound and life-altering impact on them in terms of sensitizing their reward centre to the fantasy world of online object sex. Almost ALL of the porn addicts I counsel were exposed as children to either printed or online pornography. Those who only viewed printed porn (magazines) generally took much longer than those exposed to hard core online videos to develop the criteria of an “addiction” in their life.

### **Effects on Individuals**

I have observed the following effects on those who have been repeatedly exposed to hardcore and violent porn:

- \*Self-hatred and loathing at their inability to control their behaviour
- \* Arrest due to downloading child pornography
- \*Depression and despair due to increasing feelings of powerlessness
- \* The normalization of abuse and exploitation of others in a sexual context
- \* Reduced empathy for the suffering of others
- \* Increased obsession and preoccupation with viewing porn
- \*Job loss. Watching porn at work often leads to job loss, which in turn leads to financial hardship and marital stress.
- \*Loss of productivity. I have had clients in recovery that have reported 20%-30% increase in income and productivity after stopping their porn viewing. People watching porn at work are costing our economy million of dollars a year in lost productivity, as well as potential sexual harassment law suits.

### Effects on Couples

- Marital conflict. Because of the lies and secrecy that almost always surround this behaviour, trust is destroyed in the marriage. Divorce lawyers are telling us that 30%-50% of new divorces involve some type of compulsive sexual behaviour, almost always involving habitual pornography use.
- Damage to couples intimate relationships. I often hear from women that their partners start to make requests for sex acts (that they see in porn), that they feel are degrading and disrespectful. Often they go along with it against their better judgment and later regret this. This leads to resentment and other negative consequences. Many porn users have admitted to me that they want to re-enact what they see in pornography with little to no regard for the feelings of their partner. Thus exposure to online porn is affecting the most intimate aspect of people's relationships. Pornography robs couples of the feelings of mutual trust and safety that are essential to a successful intimate relationship.
- Inability to perform sexually. This is particularly common among people under 30 who have grown up with the Internet. By the time they reach their late teens or early 20's they have consumed so much online porn that their brains are unable to respond sexually to a real life partner. As a result they have trouble achieving and maintaining arousal and climax with their real life sexual partner. This is usually distressing to both parties and they are often not aware of the cause. After a period of abstinence from pornography normal sexual functioning returns. In other words, exposure to hard core online porn is ruining people's sex lives.

### The Degrading Nature of Pornography. (Trigger Warning)

Online pornography is not created in a vacuum. It embodies a way of seeing the world. I feel it is important for the members of the Committee to understand the nature of online pornography, to get a sense of the "spirit" behind it, the language, and the worldview. There are a few important themes that we must understand are prevalent in online pornography:

1/ Women are not human beings. They are (sexual) objects. They exist for the sexual gratification of others (primarily men). This is apparent by the way photo galleries show close ups of vaginas, breasts and buttocks. There are no names or personalities. Women are disembodied body parts.

2/ Women are not valued. The common language in referring to women on porn sites are "sluts", "whores", "bitches", "cum dumpsters", "meat holes", "horny little bitches", "meat tunnels", "nymphos" and other similar references. Imagine the most horrible terms that you would never dream of speaking to another human being and these are common practice in the world of online porn.

3/ Women are portrayed as enjoying and welcoming their sexual abuse. There is often a dialogue that accompanies the portrayal of sex such as "The filthy little whore couldn't get enough cock meat as it was stuffed in every hole". This is not unusual at all in the online dialogue of Internet porn. I could go on and on with thousands of examples exactly like this one or worse, but one example is sickening enough. Consider the impact of this way of thinking and talking on gender relations, woman's equality,

and on how children form their perceptions of sex, relationships, and how people should treat each other.

### Effects on Children and Teens

Children and teens are undeveloped sexually and do not possess the cognitive or emotional skills to process sexual activity, which is why we protect them from abuse, have strict laws around consent, and recognize the harms of unwanted sexual exposure to children.

The reality is however, that every home with an Internet and a computer or cell phone is a gateway for any child to access violent abusive and degrading sexual images. This is usually traumatic and upsetting for them. Many children who view this will cry because it is so upsetting to them to see people act in this manner. It could be considered a form of child abuse. It is also common practice for pedophiles to show porn to their victims to groom them for sex.

I recommend viewing the film “Over 18” that describes with real life examples the reality of 8 and 9 year old porn addicts who became obsessed with online porn while sitting at home at the kitchen table doing their homework because inattentive parents were not filtering their devices and were unaware of the predatory nature of online pornographers.

<http://www.over18doc.com/> is the link to view the trailer.

### Recommendations

- 1/ The federal government view pornography as a public health crisis and treat this as a dangerous and harmful substance that must be regulated, much like we do with tobacco and illegal street drugs.
- 2/ Launch a national campaign educating persons on the harms and dangers of consuming online pornography.
- 3/ Incorporate training on harms of porn for police, RCMP, public servants, military, medical and health care professionals
- 4/ Require every Internet Service Provider to have an “opt-in” option to access adult content.
- 5/ Have actual, effective age-verification protocols in place for adult websites, similar to gambling websites.
- 6/ Amend and enforce obscenity laws to ban publication or production of hard-core degrading pornography.
- 7/ A discussion on the harms of pornography on the Agenda of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers of Health Conference to begin a national dialogue.
- 8/ Funding for treatment programs
- 9/ Coordinating with child advocacy organizations, woman’s support groups, sexual assault centres, Children’s Aid Society, and parents groups to increase availability of educational resources.
- 10/ Federal government coordination with provincial, territorial, and national medical and psychological regulatory bodies to invest funding for additional research with a multi-disciplinary approach (nursing, medical, social workers, health care providers, neurologists, researches and therapists).

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.