

BEHAVIORAL ADDICTIONS IN TEENS

Presented by David Flack, MA, LMHC, SUDP

Email: david@davidflack.com • Web: www.davidflack.com • Phone: (206) 327-4478

CASE STUDY: MICHAEL

Michael is a 17-year-old Caucasian male who identifies as straight.

At age 5, he and his younger brother entered foster care due to sexual abuse, neglect, and drug use in their home. By age 9, Michael had been in six different foster placements. Two of those moves happened after he was caught engaging in inappropriate sexual behavior with another child in the home. With each move, Michael's behavior became more problematic—including angry outbursts, lying, hoarding food, and increasingly oppositional behavior. At age 10, he and his younger brother were adopted by a gay male couple, which is where they live today.

Michael was first exposed to porn at age 11, during the COVID quarantine. "I was bored during online school and a friend sent me a link... At first, I thought it was kind of gross, 'cause it reminded me of all the trauma stuff, but I kept going back and then finding other porn online, too." Over the next several months, Michael's viewing increased. He said, "Sometimes I'd have two windows open, so I could do school and watch porn... A couple times, I masturbated during online school. Nobody could see, but that's still pretty creepy, I guess."

By the time in-person school resumed, Michael was viewing pornography daily. He reported that at least twice he viewed in class. "I didn't masturbate, obviously, but I felt like I needed to get a 'fix' or something. So, I watched on my phone under the desk. I knew could get caught, but that just made it more intense."

Michael started visiting online goon sites at age 16. "It felt a little strange at first. I mean, I was 16 and shouldn't even be there, and here were all these guys were on cameras masturbating... I'm not into guys, but by the third or fourth time, I wasn't a big deal and I was doing it, too... And when I was, I didn't feel any anxiety for like the first time in years. I didn't feel anything at all, really, 'cuz you can't goon and think at the same time."

When we initially met, Michael had a long list of mental health diagnoses, including PTSD, ADHD, Conduct Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and Major Depressive Disorder. Additionally, during the intake process, he acknowledged use of marijuana 3 or 4 times a week, usually while on goon sites. I diagnosed Michael with PTSD, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and Cannabis Use Disorder-Mild. Eventually, I added a diagnosis of ADHD-Predominately Hyperactive/Impulsive.

At our first meeting, Michael acknowledged continuing use since getting caught by his dads. He also identified a desire to reduce his porn viewing, but didn't think it was necessary to stop entirely. He said, "The whole gooning thing is pretty fucked up. I know that and really need to just stop, but I don't think a little porn is a big deal... It's my life and my dads can't stop me, even if they think they can."

**Read the case study above.
Then in small groups, discuss
the questions on the next page.**

The six Stages of Use are No Use Ever, Experimental Use, Occasional Use, Regular Use, Abuse / Misuse, and Addiction. Where would you place Michael's pornography viewing? Why?

In what ways might Michael's pornography viewing be functional?

What are your thoughts about Michael's use of marijuana while viewing porn?

If Michael was your client, what would be your first steps in counseling?

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

- **The Anxious Generation**, by J. Haidt
- **Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions**, by A. Giordano
- **The Craving Mind**, by J. Brewer
- **Dopamine Nation**, by A. Lembke
- **Irresistible**, by A. Alter
- **Treating Addiction**, by W. Miller, A. Forcehimes & A. Zweben

Articles

- **The Goon Squad**, by D. Kolitz (Harper's Magazine, 11/25)
- **On Tilt**, by J. Craven (Harper's Magazine, 2/26)
- **Perverse Exhilaration**, by D. Kolitz & M. Sherrill (Harper's Magazine, 11/25)

Podcasts

- **The Addicted Mind: Understanding Behavioral Addictions**
- **The New Yorker Radio Hour: Social Media Goes to Court**
- **On the Media: The Social Media Addiction Trials Begin**
- **Search Engine: What's Actually on Teenagers' Phones?**
- **Search Engine: An Anthropology of Gooning**

Documentary

- **Social Studies**, by L. Greenfield (available on Hulu)