



EPISODE 4

Cassy Hulse: Open Your Heart to Women Silently Struggling with Porn Addiction

[Breaking the Silence Podcast by Reach 10](#) with hosts **Creed Orme** and **Crishelle Simons**

Pornography isn't just a guy problem. It's a human problem, and Cassandra (Cassy) Hulse is on a mission to make sure that women who struggle with pornography use aren't left out of the conversation. After years of struggling in secret and drowning in shame, Cassy decided enough was enough and came forward on social media about her lifelong battle with pornography addiction. In this episode, she talks about how compassion, inclusion, and love catapulted her into recovery and how she's been transformed by it all. She talks about the unique struggles women face, what you can do to help the women in your life, and how breaking the silence on female pornography use is changing the world for the better.

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- Creed: [00:51](#) Welcome back listeners to Breaking the Silence by Reach 10 with your hosts Creed and Crishelle. Today we are breaking the silence with Cassandra Hulse on themes regarding women and pornography. But we'll call her Cassy because she's our dear friend and we love having her. Thank you for being here with us, Cassy.
- Cassandra: [01:17](#) Thank you guys. I'm excited.
- Crishelle: [01:19](#) We're so stoked to have you on the show. This is awesome. It's incredible because we are so looking forward to hearing your

story, your side of things, because we feel like there's a lot of silence regarding women and pornography, women's use of it, and women's topics regarding it. And we feel like you're a strong voice for that. So we're so excited to have you and hear your thoughts regarding those aspects.

Cassandra: [01:48](#)

Yeah. Awesome.

Crishelle: [01:49](#)

So tell us a little bit about yourself. Tell us your story, just like who you are.

Cassandra: [02:47](#)

So I grew up in Oregon and I go, well, I went to BYU, I'm done with school now. I studied linguistics emphasizing in English and Spanish and I'm learning French right now and right now I'm working as a full time freelance writer, which I love. I get to work from home and I have a cat, so I just get to spend all day writing with my cat.

Creed: [03:19](#)

What's your cat's name?

Cassandra: [03:20](#)

Sammy. Yeah, it's pretty great. As I'm saying this out loud, I think, wow, I'm making my way to a crazy cat lady. But that's okay because it's a great life.

Creed: [03:38](#)

Very simple. Yeah. You have a friend all the time.

Cassandra: [03:41](#)

Yes, haha, and living here in Provo, you know, you're right next to the mountains and that's another one of my favorite things to do is to like get out and hike and yeah, I just love it.

Cassandra: [03:52](#)

So as far as my story goes regarding pornography, I was exposed to internet pornography when I was about 11 years old. At that age we're obviously going through a lot of changes and I did not like middle school. I didn't like any of the things I was having to deal with at that age, yet alone, some traumas that I was dealing with as well. So I found internet pornography and I found that it

made me feel better and I just started going to it more and more often as a coping mechanism. And eventually as a teenager, I was using it regularly, sometimes multiple times a day and not a single person on earth knew. I was so afraid to tell anyone about it. I thought people would call me a freak or think that I was like, disgusting. And so I was terrified to even say the word pornography out loud. And so then I kind of, you know, once I went off to college, my life circumstances with roommates and things changed. So I was able to kind of break out of the regular habitual use of pornography and I was able to serve a mission for my church, which is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And I served in Lima, Peru, and it was awesome and I loved it and I thought that pornography was behind me and that I didn't have to worry about it anymore. Before leaving, I had told my Bishop about it. He said, "you're totally fine." Like, "thank you for telling me, don't do it again." And you know, I said, "Oh yes. Okay. Of course." Like, yeah, I hope to never do it again but getting back from my mission life is hard. And just a couple months after being home, I had a slip up with pornography and I was devastated by it. And after that slip up, I talked to my Bishop, but then it still kept happening and I didn't understand why it kept happening. So there was a ton of shame there because first, I thought that I had left it behind me and I thought that I was being a hypocrite. And especially after spending 18 months teaching people about Jesus Christ. And then here I am watching pornography. And so you know, besides that I'm a woman and women are "not supposed" to have anything to do with pornography.

Creed: [07:46](#) That's what our culture says.

Cassandra: [07:48](#) Exactly. And that's what I believed. I thought that there was something wrong with me. I questioned my sexuality. I questioned everything about who I was because it was so against what our

society tells us. Right? And so there just was a lot of shame there and that shame just, it was isolating and my self-worth just was shot. So then one day, after experiencing a slip up and reaching my last straw, I decided to write a blog post about my addiction and tell the world, "Hey, my name is Cassy Hulse, and I struggle with pornography." So that was February of 2016 that I wrote it and published it on a blog and Facebook.

Creed: [09:13](#) Did lots of people read it?

Cassandra: [09:15](#) Yes.

Creed: [09:18](#) What was that like?

Cassandra: [09:19](#) It was terrifying. I still remember every detail of that day. The one thing that happened that I did not expect was an outpouring of love. So I had almost 3000 views in like 12 hours and it kind of petered off from there. So it didn't go viral or anything, but I only had like 800 Facebook friends. So to me that was like, well this is crazy cause just yesterday, like, five people knew about my struggle and now potentially almost 3000 people know, so yeah, it was terrifying. But the outpouring of love came through hundreds of messages on Facebook and text messages, emails, comments on my blog, just mostly from women saying things like, "thank you so much, I thought I was the only one." And some guys saying "thank you, I had no idea that women struggled with this too." Or messages from women saying things like, "thank you for letting me know that I'm not alone." So that probably was one of the most life changing experiences I've had, learning that if I was willing to reach out and say, "Hey, I struggle with this," there are actually hundreds of people who can reach back to you and say, "Hey, me too. You're not alone."

Creed: [11:42](#) That's powerful. Powerful. You're not alone specifically in that regard of being a woman using pornography. It's something that

tons of people deal with and it's not just a man's problem. It's a person problem. And it's something that we need to overcome together.

Cassandra: [12:01](#)

Exactly.

Crishelle: [12:02](#)

I think that's one of the most difficult things. And one of the biggest themes that I have found in this is that we often think that we're alone and that no one understands. And I think that's one of the biggest lies that we buy into in the struggle of figuring out our sexuality and figuring out how to cope and deal with life in a healthy way. And surprise, surprise. We're all thinking we're all alone in the same seat.

Crishelle: [12:37](#)

I'm really curious, how did this impact your self-worth?

Cassandra: [12:43](#)

In a lot of ways, but first I guess just specifically as a woman, the pornography that I was either reading or seeing, often portrayed perfect women. And so constantly I was receiving this message of "this is what you're supposed to look like" and I don't look like that, therefore I am unlovable. And that probably was the biggest message that I was receiving through pornography. The other one would be the shame, the silence and secrecy and isolation that comes through being caught up in it and that something was wrong with me, that I wasn't supposed to be struggling with a man's problem. Which now we know is a human's problem. And so those two major things put me into this shell of thinking that I just was not good enough and that I could not be loved or would not be worthy of love while I struggled with pornography.

Crishelle: [14:52](#)

So where are you at with that now? How have you overcome that?

Cassandra: [14:59](#)

I am way beyond that now.

Crishelle: [15:06](#)

Hallelujah!

Cassandra: [15:07](#) Yeah, So I entered recovery officially, which means going to meetings, seeking help from a therapist, joining a group, having a support system, having a plan. So I started doing that in March of 2016 and since then God has helped me completely change my life.

Creed: [16:14](#) So you made your Facebook post in February, right? And then just a month later you started doing all these things to progress towards recovery.

Cassandra: [16:34](#) Yeah.

Creed: [16:34](#) I think that's really important and cool that you were able to humble yourself, I guess, in a way to do that. Because I think it takes humility to be like, ok, I need help. I can't stop this on my own. I need the support group. I need a therapist. I need to take these actions to help myself. I can't just try and do it by myself anymore. Right? With God, with support people.

Crishelle: [19:07](#) And where are you at now? Like how do you like your self worth?

Cassandra: [19:20](#) Now life is awesome. I'm still in therapy. I still go to my weekly group addiction recovery meetings. I'm still working the 12 steps. A lot of people think that you arrive at being recovered but the truth is the work never ends and not because you're always going to be broken. It's not like that at all, because I feel whole, I feel healed now. It's that I have discovered these amazing tools like therapy and like my addiction recovery group that have allowed me to be stronger and to be happier. And so I'm going to continue using those tools even 20 years from now, so using these tools continually, it's allowed my self-worth to just grow and grow and grow. Learning different tools like affirmations and finding those tools that I can add to my belt that just help me to know that I am worth recovery. I'm worth being happy and most importantly, I'm worthy of love.

- Creed: [21:17](#) Beautiful. Good. I'm glad you've been able to increase in those beliefs and feelings. So important for everybody to feel.
- Crishelle: [21:28](#) I just like felt how true all of those statements were as you were saying them, like you are so worthy of love and I feel that from you and I'm just really, really proud of you and honored to know you and all of the feelings.
- Cassandra: [21:46](#) Aw Crishelle...
- Crishelle: [21:46](#) I just think the world of you, as you talked a little bit about just in differences in your experience in recovery compared to like men that you've talked to, are there any other differences that have been hard for you to navigate or just interesting to navigate even?
- Cassandra: [22:09](#) Yeah, just in the past few years alone, we've had a bit of an increase in support materials for women, but that being said, there still is just a huge lack of resources. I am lucky enough to live in an area where we have multiple women only recovery groups and I hope they exist elsewhere, but yeah, that has been the biggest challenge is that. Just for instance, we have almost 15 men's only recovery groups in the area, but there are only two women's groups right now. And that number's always changing, but, that just is kind of a good ratio to give. I feel like even with books and any other materials, so that has been probably the biggest challenge. And then of course, because there aren't a lot of resources or very many women talking about their own struggles with it, probably the biggest hurdle that women have to get into recovery is finding the courage to say something to a trusted friend, because, you know, not only do you have to find the courage to say it, but you hope that you say it to the right person who can react with love. Luckily that has been my case almost 100% of the time.

Creed: [24:28](#) So what do you think friends and family can do to help? Well, not just friends and family, but leaders and people can do to help girls and women who struggle with pornography?

Cassandra: [24:41](#) The very first thing that I would say is just be willing to talk about it. Be willing to change your vernacular. Like I'm just talking about growing up in a religious setting. Whenever we would hear the term pornography, when I was young, it would always be directed at the men. And that was so so hard for me because every single time it was like pouring another cup into my shame bucket.

Crishelle: [25:24](#) Probably another bucket.

Cassandra: [25:25](#) Yeah. And so, being aware that the words you say, the pronouns you use when you're talking about pornography, just being willing to be more inclusive with your language, I think that that is like the number one thing that you could do. Never make any assumptions that this person you're talking to doesn't struggle with it. I had a few women ecclesiastical leaders who would have to talk about pornography, but they would preface it with, "now I know none of you struggle with this, but we need to talk about pornography." And I think that they were hoping that by saying that they didn't want any of the girls to feel bad, you know? It was kind of like a reassuring thing like, "Hey, we're not going to point anyone out. We just need to talk about it." When in reality it had the opposite effect where to the girl who was struggling with pornography, it felt like an absolute isolating and shaming...

Creed: [27:10](#) Waterfall and tears . . .

Cassandra: [27:12](#) Yeah. Yes.

Creed: [27:14](#) Even though the good intentions were there just improper use of language and, and perspective.

Cassandra: [27:21](#) Exactly. Right.

Creed: [27:21](#) We need to say flat out "ok women, some of you might struggle with this and in fact statistics show that many of you will. So this is something we need to talk about."

Cassandra: [27:33](#) Yeah. Yeah. And just being able to do it with love.

Crishelle: [27:38](#) I remember having those conversations in Young Women's (youth group) and my Young Women groups in the neighborhood and, yeah, it was always like, "I know none of you struggle with this," which did not help my narrative either, at all because of like, "Yeah, I don't struggle with it. Men are stupid." And that wasn't healthy for me. And I can only imagine how isolating that was for you and how then your leaders were not someone safe that you could talk to, which is not what they want. That's not what we want to communicate. And I think now as a young adult and as more of a leader figure with my kids, I always want to be a safe spot for them to talk to regardless of their gender, regardless of their struggle, regardless of whatever it is. I want to be safe. And so I think that's probably what I love most about you, Cassy, is you've always helped me to shift my perspective. And to love people better.

Cassandra: [28:43](#) Thank you Crishelle.

New Speaker: [28:43](#) What advice would you have for parents and for adults who are working with kids?

Cassandra: [29:05](#) The first thing that comes to mind is to not let fear rule your relationship with your child. Pornography, it can be a terrifying thing and it is, it's an evil that has plagued this world, but that doesn't mean that your child is evil. It doesn't mean that your child is broken or...

Crishelle: [29:45](#) I think we could also say that your friend isn't evil or your friend isn't broken, right. And this isn't just applied to parent child relationships, but any relationship.

Cassandra: [29:59](#) Yeah, exactly. There was a BYU professor and I don't remember his name, but I'm going to quote him anyways. The essence of what he said was, if you're viewing someone as like, you need to fix them, then that won't go anywhere. But if you're viewing this person as you love them, you want to help them, you want to serve them, then that's where real work can happen. Real progress and real repairing of relationships can happen. And I think that that goes, like you said, Crishelle, between any relationship. I know that there is a lot of fear for parents that they feel this responsibility to heal their child. Our friend Rachel Andrews gave this awesome analogy. When your teen is learning to drive a car, you sit in the passenger seat and you give guidance, but you cannot hop onto their lap and steer the car and be in control of the gas and the brake. And I think that is something that parents need to remember about pornography, with their kids is that the more you are willing to be brave, to have vulnerable and loving conversations, the more success you'll have in building trust and connection and safety, which are the things that your teen needs the most, or child, if they're struggling with pornography. Be that person who loves them unconditionally and who you can help build that connection with.

Creed: [33:01](#) Yeah. I love that it takes proactive parents to realize that they need to contribute to an atmosphere of welcoming openness, honesty, so that if their children are struggling with pornography or any other issue that they are, they would be comfortable and willing to go to their parents to seek help. And for the parents, I love that analogy as well, to understand that they still need to respect the autonomy of their child. And their pace, like how fast they're willing to go, how slow they are willing to go. I think

parents can totally, you know, help be a navigator and be like, "Hey, this is a great direction to go or this could help" or something, but it's still in the power of the child.

Cassandra: [33:48](#)

Yeah. And talking about how this might be different for girls, if your little girl is struggling, or you're afraid she might struggle with pornography, something to remember is that it starts with self-esteem. It starts with body image. And so you might have to have conversations with her, well and with your boys, about body image and things like that, but along the lines of, you know, like if you're sitting down and watching TV with your kids and a commercial comes on, like a Victoria secret commercial, you can ask your kids questions about it and use that as an opportunity to talk to them and be like, "Hey, how does that make you feel that she is dressed like that?" And you can ask your daughters that too, not just your boys. And as you expound on those conversations and start asking questions and talking to them about how their self-worth doesn't come from how they look, you know, being willing to have those conversations about being sexually healthy and abstaining from pornography, but also recognizing that these girls have so much more power than what pornography tells them they have. As women we learn that our power comes from our bodies and how our bodies are used and what they look like. And taking time to have many conversations with your children, your sons and daughters, but definitely your daughters about how their power does not come from looking like a Victoria secret model.

Crishelle: [36:36](#)

I think that the message is so clear though is that our self-worth is so much deeper than just what we look like and show up to be right?

- Crishelle: [37:12](#) What advice would you give young men who may not have thought about the possibility of women having difficulties or struggles with pornography?
- Cassandra: [37:22](#) In my experience guys have been kinder, have reacted more positively to a woman telling them about their struggles than perhaps maybe a girlfriend has reacted to a boyfriend telling her. And I think it's because, guys, you know, they've been given more of an opportunity to have these conversations and they know that they're not the only ones who struggle. They know that this is a struggle that guys have. And I think that it's probably, I mean, Creed, you can tell me what you think, like it's kind of a relief to know that women are human beings?
- Creed: [38:37](#) Oh yeah. I mean, I think for anybody to know that, once again, that they're not alone. That yes, women have their issues as well. And the fact that women can struggle with pornography as well. I mean, it definitely helps to get rid of that shame narrative that, "Oh, it's all me" and the narrative that all men are bad because they struggle with pornography. I mean, just that narrative in general is bad in a sense too because we don't want to think that anybody is bad because they struggle with pornography. But it is really helpful to know that we are all in the same boat.
- Crishelle: [39:34](#) What do you think healthy sexuality is from all your experiences and interests now in your life?
- Cassandra: [39:44](#) Healthy sexuality is just like any other area in your life that you want to work on. If it's physical health, emotional health, mental health, financial health, there's sexual health too. It's something that you're always working on that you always are learning about and trying to improve.
- Crishelle: [40:28](#) I just want to say hallelujah. Amen. Yes, exactly. Got that off my chest.

Cassandra: [40:36](#) Feel free to do that again anytime! So yeah, for me as a single sexually inactive woman, my healthy sexuality looks a lot like education, boundaries, practicing hygiene...it's just all about loving myself or at least not hating myself. It's about respecting my body and being happy that I have a body. And, yeah, I mean there are so many different facets when we're talking about healthy sexuality, but I guess for me, those are the ones I focus the most on, especially boundaries as I'm dating and being in different relationships with different people and, just practicing safety and respect for myself and the people around me.

Crishelle: [42:01](#) So yeah, I love that so much. Education is the first step of just like figuring out who I am as a sexual being and my story is a little bit different and we've already gone there. But I had shoved my sexuality in a box and locked that box in a safe and locked that safe in the bottom of the ocean because of the fear that I had regarding the pain that I witnessed in my life and experienced in my life because of sexuality and so for me it has taken a lot of reading, of searching for the truth. And then figuring out who I am and what I value and what I need and learning to love and accept myself for my feelings, my emotions. And, that's what I think is so fascinating about sexuality is it's more than just sex, right? Like it really is so much more than that. And I think that's one of the huge whys of pornography is that pornography just takes sexuality, and just makes it about sex and makes it about that experience, which is so, it's so much more than that. It's a holistic thing in our lives that is so important to develop and understand, and I'm still having a hard time putting words to it and I'm realizing that it impacts every aspect of my life. And a lot of it starts with how I view myself and how I view others. So..

Cassandra: [43:50](#) hallelujah!

Crishelle: [44:02](#) Well, there you go. And I guess one question for you, and I think you've touched on this a little bit, is, what good has come from this experience for you?

Cassandra: [44:15](#) I love that question. So I would never want anyone to experience what I had to experience in my life in regards to sexual trauma, pornography, all those things. Unfortunately, so many people have experienced those things. And so I love your question because I love talking about the good that has come from it because, as horrible as those experiences were and as horrible as the hold that pornography had over me was, I have found a new sense of freedom and I have found a new sense of appreciating the simple joy that comes from feeling emotions. That's either going to sound crazy to someone or really resonate with someone depending on your experiences. But, I spent most of my life numbing my emotions, you know, wanting to numb the pain. But unfortunately that also means numbing any good feelings. So in these past few years, if there's even just one thing that's come from this [recovery] that has just made life so much more enjoyable. It has been being able to feel emotions, even the bad ones and being able to be more self-aware, know what I'm feeling in my body. And then being able to reach over and help out a friend who's going through something like that too, you know? And, so I guess in these three or so years of recovery, the greatest thing has been learning who I am without pornography. And I love it. I love who I am without pornography. I love myself.

Cassandra: [47:20](#) It's probably been a year or so that I have actually been getting to know myself as kind of a new person.

Creed: [47:41](#) A free person. When you say free to love, feel, explore without being chained down by pornography and the shame surrounding all of it.

Cassandra: [47:52](#) Exactly. And free to chase after things that I want without being bogged down by thoughts of "you're not good enough" or "this will be too hard for you." Or, you know, just being free to live my life how I want to live it. Living fearlessly but with boundaries that I've learned about in recovery. It's just been awesome.

Crishelle: [48:30](#) That's so beautiful and amazing and inspiring and, and so you honestly, I think that was just perfect. Well said.

Creed: [48:40](#) It's so good to see and to hear of people who can come from something like that and be able to improve change and just be able to live life in a healthier, happier way.

Cassandra: [49:11](#) Something I hear a lot in the recovery world is that, when you're in recovery, it's like climbing a mountain and it's very, very difficult and tiring and you fall down a lot. And, there's this idea that, you know, you're climbing to get to the top and when you're at the top you've made it and there are a few things wrong with that analogy. One being that, recovery is something that you're always going to be living, right? And so in relation to what I just said, I feel like I have made it to the top of the mountain, but, the strength that I gained while climbing this mountain and the things that I learned, I'm now sitting with those tools and with that strength at the top of the mountain and I can see an incredible view of more mountains that I get to climb. And rather than being bogged down by it or terrified by it, it's a feeling of excitement and confidence and saying, "I have the strength to climb these mountains and I'm going to keep climbing mountains." It's like you go from this complete novice who hates climbing mountains to becoming a Mountaineer and it's like your life source.

Creed: [51:11](#) I love it. Well, let's all be mountaineers.

Crishelle: [51:16](#) It's been so good to have you come and share your story, share your wisdom, and share just your love with us. Thank you so much

for taking time and coming in and sharing a little bit of you with the world.

Creed: [51:37](#) We love you Cassy, thank you for your time and for sharing all of this. It's wonderful.

Cassandra: [51:40](#) Thanks you guys.