

Addiction expert says Tiger's problem is common

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The Rev. Craig Gross says it is a sure bet that Tiger Woods never imagined he would make such a mess of his life, but it is what can happen when a person is overtaken by addiction.

Gross is a co-founder of XXX Church, a national ministry that helps people who are struggling with sex and pornography addiction.

There's debate over whether or not Woods, who is in therapy, is a sex addict.

"I think it's highly debatable right now, for sure, but when you look at Tiger Woods' case, I'd say he fits all the (criteria)," Gross said. "He isn't just in love with another woman."

Gross, who has spoken at several area churches and at Malone University, gained national attention for distributing Bibles at a pornography trade show.

Gross said religious people are no more immune to such addictions than nonbelievers.

"For people with religious beliefs, the divorce rate is the same," Gross said. "I think that kind of shows, especially when it comes to sensitive issues like sex, that we're not addressing those enough in churches. We're not offering safe places where people can be honest.

"Churches may not have the same amount of drug addicts as other institutions, but there are issues that don't get addressed."

Because the average person doesn't have the same opportunities and resources as Woods, Gross said "average Joe" sex addicts frequently turn to online pornography.

"It's free, it's becoming more acceptable, and people can get it when and where they want it," he said. "But it's a gateway for a lot of other issues. I tell people that what you look at online will take you offline."

Gross said that, because pornography has no boundaries, a sex addict will "start taking risks you never thought you would."

"Your life slowly spins out of control," he said. "Most men don't come clean until they get caught."

Gross noted that ministers aren't immune but are reluctant to seek help for an addiction.

"Tiger's not going to lose his golf gig, but you're going to lose your gig as pastor if you get caught with a hooker or looking at porn," he said.

Gross said the reasons that trigger sex addiction are varied.

"For a lot of people, it's exposure to it as child," he said. "Men are very visual and have a need for sex. Tiger didn't map this out saying, 'Maybe I'll hold a press conference, with my mom in the front row.'"

Gross disputes the idea that there is no emotional component to sex addiction.

"It's all emotional," he said.

Gross said that, in the case of women and sex/pornography addiction, the popular culture plays a crucial role. He cites Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian as examples of women who became celebrities by way of sex tapes.

"We're living in a world where this is popular; sex sells," he said. "It's to the point where it's not a big deal or frowned upon as much."

He added that some women also view pornography to appease their partner, "so he doesn't cheat."

Gross said people who want to break their addiction must take certain steps.

"The first thing is recognizing you have a problem; most people are in denial," he said. "Don't wait until you get caught or lose your job or marriage."

In addition, he strongly recommends finding a support group, telling a person you can trust who will help you be accountable or online program. For more information, visit www.xxxchurch.com.

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