

85. LGBTQ+ and Porn with TJ Thomas



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sara Brewer

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You are listening to the *Overcome Pornography for Good* podcast episode 85, LGBTQ+ with Porn with TJ Thomas.

Welcome to the *Overcome Pornography For Good* podcast where we take a research-based, trauma informed and results focused approach to quitting porn. This approach has been revolutionary and changed thousands and thousands of lives. I'm your host, Sara Brewer.

Hey, you guys, welcome to the podcast episode this week. I am so excited for you to hear this interview that I just did with TJ. I love this guy. I've been following him on Instagram for a little while, really love his stuff. I really, really love what he has to share with you today, especially about being LGBTQ+ and pornography use.

For those of you who, I get questions like this occasionally, like I'm viewing gay porn, or I'm viewing this type of porn. Does this mean I'm gay? Et cetera. We're going to talk about these hard questions and TJ has a lot of personal experience around this. He is a therapist, he has a lot of experience with this, and I'm really excited for you to hear this interview. So please listen and enjoy it.

Sara: Okay you guys, welcome to the episode this week. I'm so excited because I get to interview TJ. And I don't even, your last name is Thomas, is that right?

TJ: Yeah.

Sara: TJ Thomas, I just know you as TJ Counseling because that's how I see you on Instagram. I always tell people, I'm like, "Oh yeah, my friend TJ posted this thing on Instagram," even though we've never talked. This is our first time talking.

TJ: We're all friends, it's great.

Sara: Yeah, I really, really like his Instagram page. And anyways, he's awesome. So TJ is a therapist, and you just opened your private practice, is that correct?

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TJ: Yep, about a week ago I finally got my license. It took about two years of licensure work to be able to get it after the master's degree. So it takes a minute.

Sara: It's a process.

TJ: Yeah.

Sara: Very cool. Well yeah, congratulations.

TJ: Thank you.

Sara: Also a funny random fact, but I posted something of yours, I like re-shared something that you had shared. And my cousin, she's like, "Oh, he's my brother's friend from high school." I'm like, oh, these little connections that we probably all have in the LDS sphere.

TJ: It is a small Mormon world.

Sara: Yeah. So anyways, I'm really excited, we're going to talk about LGBTQ+ and pornography, we're going to talk about myths about pornography and LGBTQ+, we're going to answer some questions that I will occasionally get about, you know, hey, I view gay porn, does that mean I'm gay? All the things and I'm really excited.

When I reached out to TJ, I was like, "Hey, I want to interview you do you want to talk about maybe scrupulosity would be a good subject?" He said, "Yeah, but actually I would love to talk about LGBTQ+ and pornography and myths and helping people with that." And I was like, "Yes, yes, yes. Yes, we need to talk about that. That is something that is really important that I've had on my mind a little bit."

So do you want to introduce yourself a little bit?

TJ: Sure, yeah. So yeah, I'm TJ, I am a therapist. I did my schooling at BYU and then USC. Let's see, I grew up in Las Vegas, I served an LDS mission to Benin Cotonou, which is West Africa for the 98% of people who've never heard of it.

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Sara: Oh my gosh, that must have been wild.

TJ: It was definitely very, very different than what I was expecting from a mission. But yeah, so let's see some fun facts about me. I'm a bit obsessed with Lego. And when I say a bit, I mean like, a lot. And I like to do a lot of theater, and music, and acting and stuff for fun. I think that's the quick version.

Sara: Cool, I love it. And then tell us a little bit why did you want to talk about LGBTQ+ and pornography? Why is that important to you?

TJ: Yeah, so I myself am LGBTQ+ and also a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. And so growing up with that was really complicated. It's a really hard space to navigate both and, unfortunately, because, how do I say this nicely? Because of cultural norms surrounding sexuality within the LDS church there are not a lot of outlets for queer youth.

And what that does is it makes porn one of the most easily accessible outlets for exploring confusing sexualities or different sexualities than what they're hearing about or seeing all around them. And so dealing with it myself growing up, my own pornography issues growing up related to being LGBTQ and trying to figure that out, I was deeply in denial about my sexuality until my mid-20s.

So it took a long time for me because there was so much shame built up around being LGBTQ. And then on top of that, the shame that's already there around pornography. So it was just like, just layers and layers and layers of shame to work through.

And so now when I'm working with a lot of the LGBTQ+ youth that I work with, especially those who are involved in the church, pornography is involved as it is with most of the other straight or cisgendered youth of the church too. But it just has a bit of a different role or different meaning for a lot of LGBTQ+ youth that I see.

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It does a lot of the same things and there's a lot of the same pieces that we address when we're working on it. But yeah, it has a little bit of a different twist to it.

Sara: Yeah, very cool. Yeah, I can imagine that. I mean, that would be a big process.

TJ: It takes a long time. Luckily, the youth today seem to be in a lot better situation as queer identity is being more normalized and more talked about more accepted. So they already have a head start of where I was at their age, which is really great. But there's also just, there's more resources. People are actually talking about it, there's multiple podcasts and, you know, famous people about being LGBTQ and LDS.

And so there's a lot more people to look at and be like, "Oh, hey, that's me," or "That's what I'm like." Or they can hear these podcasts, hear the stories of other people, and know that they're not completely alone in it. Which is, as you know, one of the biggest factors of driving pornography use is the isolation and the secrecy.

Sara: Yeah. And so I'm so excited that you're here just to share this because I know that there are going to be a lot of people who relate to it. And like, we're destigmatizing porn, and now we're destigmatizing being LGBTQ and pornography.

And if you can imagine, for those of you who might not be LGBTQ, if you can imagine the shame you feel about porn use. And then just try to imagine also being taught that it's bad to have this identity, it's bad to have this sexual orientation, plus the shame of being taught about pornography.

TJ: Yeah.

Sara: How painful can that be?

TJ: Because one of the things I heard growing up a lot in all of the 10 million lessons about porn that you get in young men's class lessons was always stuff about like, well, you know, the desire is very natural. And it's a

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God given thing to procreate, and it's beautiful. And love between a man and a woman is so beautiful and wonderful.

And so like it's okay that you have the desire for sex, and you have sexual urges. But pornography is not okay. And that's where it's evil, and terrible, and poison and all those things. But then, for me sitting there as an LGBTQ+ kid who was looking at gay porn, I had this huge extra layer of okay, well, I'm not even looking at the normal stuff. I'm like, at least if I was looking at straight porn, then I'm looking at something that's beautiful and wonderful. But it's just like the wrong way to experience it.

Now, not only am I viewing pornography, which is this terrible evil curse of the last days, but I'm also looking at it for this orientation that's also evil and terrible and wrong. So yeah, it adds several layers of shame to it.

Sara: Yeah, can you talk about that a little bit? Just specifically like what was that like for you being LGBTQ? Maybe hearing like it's a choice, or this is a sin when maybe it's not. I mean, let me say that again, when maybe it's just as natural for you as it would be for someone who's straight. Do you know what I'm trying to say?

TJ: Yes, yeah. So it's hard to talk about growing up because, like I said, I was so in denial. I wasn't even like, I wasn't even letting myself think that I might be queer. And I'll just throw this out really quickly, I identify as bi but I a lot of the time just say gay because I lean more towards men than towards women in my attraction. So it's a complicated space to be in when you're bi, so I kind of use them interchangeably.

And that just made it even worse because I could go on dates with girls and be attracted to girls and find them appealing and had went on dates with girls that I thought could, you know, when I was in college I was like, "Oh, I could marry this girl." But it was very rare, because the way I think about it is that like the percentage of girls that I was attracted to, my straight friends were attracted to like 50% of the girls they met, and I was attracted to like 10% of the girls I met.

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So anyway, so yeah, because of that I like to say the closet is bigger when you're bi because there's a lot more room to hide because you can lean on that straight side of yourself to kind of cover that up. But I was so, so far away from being able to recognize that for myself that I was actually, I was very antagonistic to the LGBTQ+ community.

My first year or two of college I wrote a blog article about why I didn't support gay marriage. And I was never openly like name calling or anything like that, but I thought all of the same things, you know? I thought, oh, well, it must be a choice because God wouldn't make you that way. I thought all the same stuff that's said.

Sara: Or I'm attracted to this 10% of women, and so it is kind of a choice, right?

TJ: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And when you're bi it also adds that well, yeah, it kind of was a choice for me for a little bit. Like, oh, I can just choose this straight part of myself. So I was convinced, oh, no, it is just a choice. It's all of this stuff.

And of course I had grown up hearing all over the place, not just within the church but there for sure, all of these terrible things that are said about LGBTQ+ people. About how they are groomers, they're grooming kids to be gay, they're trying to convert people to be gay, which is ironic given how much of an emphasis we put on missionary work.

Sara: Yeah, in a lot of ways.

TJ: But yeah, they're trying to convert kids to be gay. Or if you hang out with gay people you'll turn gay because it's like contagious. You know, just all the messed up stuff that just flat out isn't true and that I'm still having to deal with.

I mean, by the time I started actually figuring out my sexuality and I was working with a bishop on it, which that sentence alone tells you about the mindset I was in. I was working with a bishop about my sexuality, instead of just being like, "This is who I am." I ended up losing a job that required a

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bishop's approval because he didn't think that it was safe for me to be working with teens.

So I've been on the side of thinking those things because that's just what I grew up thinking and I was in so much denial. And then I've been on the side of having the direct effect of those things. So I understand it's a very long complicated road for people to walk accepting their own sexuality, or if it's like a parent or someone who has a kid that comes out.

It takes a while to wrap your brain around something that's so different than what you grew up hearing, and thinking, and believing because it was just what was told to you all the time and you were surrounded by this. So that took, like I said, that took years.

That took over a decade to be able to get to that point. And it was in my mid 20s when I had, like I said, growing up I had been looking at porn and mostly gay porn. And that was something for me that, I came up with every justification possible. Every way that I could spin it so that I wasn't queer.

It was that, oh, well, you know, women are more sacred and they're the special, beautiful daughters of God and so I need to save them for marriage. So that's why I don't look at women in porn, but I look at men in porn because it's just other dudes. And it's just like I see dudes in the locker room, so it's not a big deal if I see them in porn. And so like all these justifications to try to give me a reason of why it was okay.

Which, you know, justifying is part of any bad habit that we have that we're trying to change. But it included trying to justify why that was even what I was attracted to in the first place and trying anything I could to not admit that I was actually attracted to it. But that it was just, oh, it was just more convenient. Or it was, you know, whatever.

And it wasn't until I worked with my own therapist, who was so great that finally I was able to realize, okay, this is actually just part of who I am. And then it was, there was still a lot of shame involved with it even once I did accept it or acknowledge it. I was still very shameful about it, very closeted.

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And then it was in listening to some podcasts. Listen, Learn, and Love by Rich Ostler and Questions From The Closet by Ben Schilaty and Charlie Bird, that I started to hear stories of other queer members of the church. And I started to hear how many other LGBTQ LDS people there were.

Then I started to realize, and heard some of their testimonies and their experiences of praying to Heavenly Father about their identity and whether that identity was truly something that was part of them, and how he felt about it. Or some really great ones about including heavenly mother in their relationship and how that opened up their understanding of gender norms and roles.

So a lot of these cool ideas and experiences by hearing the stories of other people that allowed me to finally get to that place where I could love myself and accept myself exactly the way I am and not feel like it was this terrible, deep, dark secret. I mean, this was the secret like for years and years. This was the thing that I was terrified people would find out about. And now I'm on a podcast talking about it.

So it was a very long process, but it has gotten me to a place where it's not just something that I accept about myself, but it's something that I celebrate about myself. Which is hard for a lot of LDS people to understand because a lot of people still see it as like a trial to be endured or something like that.

But I know that if I weren't exactly who I am, which includes being LGBTQ, then I- Here's a good way to say it. A lot of people talk about, especially within the context of the church, it's okay to be gay but just don't act on it. That's kind of the language that's used.

But when they say don't act on it, what they're trying to say is don't have sex. That's really what they're trying to say. But for anyone listening please stop using that phrase. Because acting on it, if I'm not acting on being queer, then I am not as compassionate because I wouldn't be as compassionate as I am if I weren't.

Part of my being of being LGBTQ has given me so many gifts and so many skills and talents that I wouldn't have without it. Because I wouldn't have

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had to get outside of my comfort zone. I wouldn't have had to understand marginalized people. I wouldn't have had to do all of this work that I've done if it weren't for this part of myself.

So being queer is about so much more than just your sexual orientation or what pronouns you use. Just like being straight is about more than who you want to have sex with. There's so much more to it than that, that permeates every part of your being.

And so I know through some very personal spiritual experiences that Heavenly Father is totally good with me and I'm totally good with him. That my sexual orientation is not a problem for him. And that the only people it's a problem for are some of his children on the planet who have just got a little bit of growing up to do.

Sara: Yeah. Yeah, I love that, that's beautiful. When you say it's okay to be gay or it's okay to be queer, but just don't act on it, it's almost, well I don't know if it's a good comparison. But it's almost like it's okay to be a woman but don't like act on it.

TJ: Yeah.

Sara: Because it's like who you are. It's who you are, it's all this experience that you've had in your life. Of course you're going to act on it, of course you're going to be yourself.

TJ: Right, and it influences so many other parts of your life, right? And actually, I think that is a good comparison because just like being a woman, there's so many things about being a woman that are just cultural stereotypes that aren't actually what being a woman is. But that's what people when people think of it that's what they're talking about.

And so getting out of those stereotypes and moving away from those cultural norms can be really important and really healthy for people to be their version of whatever it is they are. And for some people in the queer space, and especially within the queer LDS space, that does include the

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fact that they decide to stay single, or celibate for their whole life so that they can stay in the church and go to the temple.

For some people, they start off on that and then they decide or realize that that's not for them and that they can't actually do that. For some people it means leaving the church. And we need to be more okay with the discomfort of having multiple answers for different people and that not everyone's going to get the same answer.

Sara: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. I recently, this is a little tangent and then we'll get back to pornography.

TJ: Sure.

Sara: But I recently heard, I loved this example. Someone, I think it was Cynthia and Susan, I don't know if you know them, they're in the LDS space that last podcast. But they talked about church and people's relationship with the church like marriages.

So every single person's marriage is different. For some people, their marriage is very fulfilling and beautiful. For other people, their marriage has some problems but they're willing to work through it because it's worth it for them. And for other people, it's just toxic and it just is not good. And it's just so much healthier for them to leave.

It's the same with church, everyone's relationship with the church is very different. For some people it's really fulfilling. For some people there's issues, but they still want to make it work. And for other people it's not, it's healthier for them to leave and to get out of that relationship. And we have to be so careful that we don't say, "My relationship is this, and so that means your relationship should be this," right?

I would never say to someone, "My marriage is so fulfilling, so why isn't your marriage so fulfilling? It should be better." We need to be careful that we don't do that with religion.

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TJ: Absolutely, yeah, for sure. And people often tend to conflate their religious experience or their relationship with the church with a person's relationship or experience with God, which are also very different things. And so it's important to not see someone who leaves the church, or someone who stays in the church, either direction, and make that mean well therefore they are closer to or farther from God.

Sara: Yes, yes, absolutely. We can talk about that for like-

TJ: That could be a whole episode.

Sara: That could be a whole other things. Okay, I love it. All right, so let's talk about the myth that being LGBTQ+ or queer is caused by porn use.

TJ: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Okay, here's the simplest way to say this, if sexuality was caused by porn use, then a lot of gay guys would have turned themselves straight by now. Because if you are familiar with the history of conversion therapy, which was thankfully outlawed in Utah. But unfortunately is now being talked about being un-outlawed, which is just awful and the worst.

But conversion therapy took many forms. The basics of it was trying to change someone's sexual orientation, always from gay to straight. No one was ever trying to convert you to being gay.

Sara: When you flip it, when you flip stuff like that, you see the problems.

TJ: Right, yeah.

Sara: Same with gender stuff, right?

TJ: Yeah.

Sara: Okay. Yeah, go ahead.

TJ: So they would do things like show gay men straight pornography while forcing them to stimulate themselves, to masturbate. And that was one way that they thought that they would be able to turn gay people straight. Newsflash, never worked.

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A lot of gay people that I know have done similar self-induced attempts at turning themselves straight again. Because especially gay people being raised in the church, they hate the fact that they're gay for a lot of years, at least in the past. Like I said, things are changing a bit now. And they've tried to choose to be straight, they've tried to make themselves straight. And one of those that a lot of people tried, including myself, was watching straight porn to try to make yourself like that more.

Sara: Yes.

TJ: And it just doesn't work. It just does not work. That's not how it works. So watching straight porn won't turn you straight, and watching gay porn won't turn you gay. That's just not how it works.

What might happen is if you're already, because even the LDS church, just so we're on the right playing field, in their official statements the LDS church acknowledges that being gay is not a choice. If you are, and the church doesn't give a statement for what they believe causes homosexuality, but they do at least admit that it's not a choice.

If you do have some queerness in you, whether that's gay, bi, whatever, and you start exploring that sexuality through gay porn, that can be a window or an insight into part of your sexuality. Because if you're straight and you look at gay porn, you're probably not going to like it. It's just not going to appeal to you. Just like gay guys who are fully gay watching straight porn, it's not going to appeal to him.

So yeah, I would say that pornography is definitely much more of a clue or an insight into your sexuality than it is any cause of your sexuality.

Sara: Okay, so I can imagine some people hearing that and then feeling really nervous. And like what? Like kind of hoping that this was a just because of porn use, and it wasn't actually.

TJ: Yeah, to anyone who is feeling or thinking that, I fully understand because I've lived that, and I totally know what you're feeling and going through. But that is based on the idea that being gay is bad. Because the

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only reason that we would hope that we're not gay, is if we believe that being gay is wrong. Which even the church, while saying don't act on it, says being gay is not a sin. So it's okay.

I'll also add this, sexuality is a spectrum. It's not just gay or straight. If you are attracted to gay porn and you don't want to be gay, like first of all, come talk to a therapist, we can work on that internalized homophobia for you because that's something you're going to have to deal with. And it's not fun, I know from experience.

But it's also a spectrum. If you like both straight and gay porn, then maybe you're somewhere on that bi spectrum. You know, maybe you're somewhere in the middle. I know a guy who is, actually I know several, but one who comes to mind in particular, in a perfectly happy heterosexual marriage, has got a kid, living this great life, and he's bi. And he openly talks about how he's also attracted to men. And so for him that still works because he is still fully in love with and attracted to his wife.

Sara: And that can be, like let me just say, that's the same thing as being like, "Yes, I'm in this beautiful relationship with someone that I love, and I'm also attracted to other women." Like that's normal.

TJ: Yeah.

Sara: It's not that there's something wrong with you.

TJ: Yeah, if you're straight and you're married, there's still going to be other attractive women out there. I think the problem comes that because of a lot of bisexual guys who are able to do that and make that work, a lot of people think that that's the solution for gay guys as well. And like I said, it's all a spectrum. You know, it's overly simplified to say someone's like 50/50 men/women. That's like way over simplified.

But the Church no longer, they used to, but they no longer encourage gay guys or girls to enter into a mixed orientation marriage, which is what we call when a straight person marries a gay person to try to like fix it or make yourself straight or whatever. They don't encourage that anymore because

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there are a few examples of when it does work, the majority of cases don't, sadly.

And not to take anything away from those that have worked. There are a few stories that I know of some beautiful marriages with kids and everything that have had wonderful marriages. Very often they don't work and so the Church doesn't recommend that anymore.

So if you're feeling like, "Oh no, I look at gay porn or I like gay porn, but I don't want to be gay," like I said, I know exactly how that feels. Let's work on the part where you don't want to be gay because being gay is evil and wrong, rather than working on the part where we try to convince ourselves that we're not gay.

Sara: Yeah. Yes, that's harder work.

TJ: Yeah, it's a lot easier, well in the short term it's a lot easier to be in denial and like I did, have all the justifications of why you're looking at gay porn versus straight porn. And it's easier in the short term to have that justification and that denial, but it's a lot harder in the long term to try to keep that up.

Dismantling your internalized homophobia, which I'm still in the process of doing, it takes a long time, and it takes a lot of work. But it is so much more fulfilling because you're at least able to look at yourself in the mirror and love yourself.

Sara: Yeah, beautiful. And would you say, I just have one other question about this. Is this true where, because we're talking about the spectrums of what you find appealing sexually, right? And maybe you are attracted to some type of pornography, gay porn, whatever but really you want to have sex with a woman, and you want to have sex with your wife. And there's that spectrum of both, like I'm attracted to this visually, but like is that just-

TJ: Sure, yeah. That's why the labels are so very generic. I would say that's probably somewhere in the bi realm. There's also a difference between a sexual orientation and a romantic orientation. There are some people who

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will get very specific in their label and say that they are homosexual, heterosexual or various things like that, which can get very complicated and nuanced. So we don't have to get into all of that queer theory.

But yeah, you can do what works for you. If you love your opposite gendered partner and you're physically attracted to them and you have a fulfilling romantic intimacy life, and you also are attracted to the opposite gender, I would say you're probably somewhere in the bi spectrum. And that's okay also.

But we don't need to shame that because I'll actually say just like with porn stuff that I've seen you talk about, Sara, on your Instagram account, the more you're ashamed of that orientation, the more you're going to feel like you have to act on it in unhealthy ways, right?

So like, for me, my desire for gay porn use almost completely vanished overnight the minute that I allowed myself to acknowledge that I was gay and that I could go on dates with guys.

Sara: That does not surprise me at all.

TJ: Yeah, because the porn, like I mentioned, for so many queer people, especially in a culture, any culture that does not allow or discourages gay dating or gay relationships. If that's your only outlet for this very natural, normal desire and urge that you have to be with someone and for you that someone happens to be your same gender, if the only way you have to explore that or feel that or see that is through porn, that's where you're going to go for it.

For me, once I opened myself up to well, actually, I can just like go on a date and I can experience relationships with these guys that I'm interested in. I can see a cute guy on the street and think he's really attractive and not feel like I have to repress that and hate myself for that. Then all of a sudden all this porn stuff just like fades away. Because, as we know, porn isn't actually about sex, it's about emotional masking of all the other stuff that we've got going on.

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So removing the shame around my orientation, ironically, was the thing that made me need to look at porn about my orientation less. People might think, “Oh, well, if I admit that I'm gay and if I accept that I'm gay, then I'm just going to look at gay porn all day.” Actually, in a lot of the cases, it's the opposite.

Sara: I love this conversation because anyone who's listened to my podcast will absolutely understand this. I don't talk about it in like a gay frame or queer framing, but I talk about that all the time. All the time.

So of course, like when you're walking down the street and you see someone in, anyways, whatever that you're attracted to and you're like, “No, no, no, that's horrible, I shouldn't think that.” It leads to way more porn use than if you just say, “Oh yeah, I notice that I'm attracted to this person. I love this part of me that is sexual,” and then we move on.

TJ: Yeah. Yeah, because porn, just like people don't become alcoholics because they're thirsty. People don't look at porn because they're horny. All of my clients think they do when they first start, but it's not. And we work on that, and I'm sure you have had experience as well.

So we have to figure out where is this emotional need coming from? What are we trying to hide from? What are we trying to buffer? What are we trying to mask? And nine times out of 10, maybe more, it's shame about something or other.

So whether it's shame about your sexuality in general, I mean, I had a kid who I was working with who, and most of the time I find this, the shame is about the porn. So then you go to the porn to recover from the shame, and then it just cycles forever, right?

But for a lot of LGBTQ people, it's the shame about being LGBTQ in general. So you remove that shame, and it fixes a lot of stuff. And it's not an easy overnight thing. When I say almost overnight, it's because I had, you know, five years of figuring myself out leading up to that moment where I could just say, and had a very cool spiritual experience with prayer, of

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being able to open myself up to acknowledging that part of myself and allowing myself to go on dates.

That yeah, it was a very cool experience to see, wow, this porn use really was not about being horny, or sex, or any of the other things that I was telling myself it was. It was because of shame, and it was because of all these other things.

Sara: Yeah, it was because you were repressing this part of you that really just want it to be loved and heard, instead of told that it's something wrong and bad and needs to be ignored. I love that. I love that, thank you.

Okay, well, how about this question, any harmful messages that we haven't talked about that LGBTQ+ people receive that will lead them to porn use? I mean, I guess we talked about the messaging that this is bad and not natural.

TJ: Yeah, I mean, that's the most basic one that comes up and that kind of encompasses everything else, is just in general being queer is bad, evil, wrong, in general.

The not natural thing is very funny to me because in religious circles of any denomination, but specifically Western Christian ideology, there's this competing interest about whether we should be natural or whether we shouldn't be natural. And in the same sentence you can tell someone to put off the natural man, and that we need to not be natural, but then also tell someone that what they're doing is unnatural.

Sara: Yes. Oh my gosh.

TJ: So what is it? Do we want to be natural? Or do we not want to be natural? So it's a very funny thing. And there's a lot of history of Western Christianity that goes into this, but first of all, being queer is natural. It also depends on how you define natural. If you're looking specifically just at what we see as a natural variation of human expression and human genomes, being queer, whether that's gay, bi, trans, non-binary, whatever has existed as long as we have recorded history.

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It is only within the last seven-ish hundred years that as the world has become more westernized we have beaten down so heavily that it seems like in recent years there's like so many more people are gay than ever before. No, they were always that way, they just didn't want to literally be beaten to death. And so they hid it.

But for all of recorded history, in almost any major civilization that we have records of, there is records of homosexuality, well they didn't have that word back then. But there's records of same sex relationships, of gender non-binary people, of transgender people all over the place. So queer people have existed forever. So it's just a natural part of human expression. It's as natural as red hair, or left handedness, or blue eyes.

And actually the percentages of the population who are queer are actually very close to those three things. So yeah. So if you know someone who's queer, left handed, or blue eyed, that's about the same percentage of people in the population who are queer.

Sara: Wow.

TJ: Yeah. So it's very natural, it's very normal, it has existed forever. It is not a sign of the last days. Oh my gosh, stop saying it's a sign of the last days. There's so much to unpack without that that I'm not even going to touch it. Just stop saying it, it's patently false.

Let's see, what else do we say that can be harmful? So I actually did an episode on Questions From The Closet about this topic of what harmful things are said about LGBTQ people.

Sara: So I'm just going to really quick mention those podcasts for people who really want more of this.

TJ: Yes, and I actually was a guest on both of them. So Listen, Learn, and Love by Richard Ostler. And Questions From The Closet by Ben Schilaty and Charlie Bird.

Sara: Really great.

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TJ: They're so great. Like I said, they helped me so much. Just hearing other people's stories and hearing that I wasn't alone made such a world of difference.

Sara; Yeah. And I'll say from someone who isn't queer, it's also so helpful to listen to. Especially Richard Ostler's Listen, Learn, Love where you just get to hear people's stories. I love how Brené Brown, she says you can't hate people up close.

TJ: Yeah.

Sara: And so if you find that you're like, oh, I don't know how I feel about this because of all that internalized teachings you've been taught, it will really bless your life and your family's life if you take time to listen to those and understand and learn to love.

TJ: Yeah. Yeah, hearing those stories and just the empathy that comes from it. That was actually the first thing my mom did when she was trying to figure out how to have a better relationship with me and what to do about all of this. She started listening to these stories and it made such a world of difference. So definitely recommend.

One thing that's super, super harmful and hurtful to say is that it will be fixed in the next life, for multiple reasons. First reason is, you don't know that. You made that up. That's something that you hope, maybe.

Sara: In the Bible it says...

TJ: Yeah, no scripture in Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, no scripture anywhere, no general authority statement no nothing ever has said that, ever. So stop saying it, that has no doctrinal basis, first of all. We have no idea what happens to queer people in the next life. You may think that they all have to be turned straight and cisgendered because that's your understanding.

But I would offer this analogy to that. Before 1839 when the very first mention of baptisms for the dead happened, the only possible explanation

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of what would happen to someone who has died without being baptized was hell. That was the only possible idea because that's the only thing they understood. Until this revelation came out that there's this other thing that can happen, that we wouldn't have even had on our radar before.

So I just want to offer that we believe in a church with continuing revelation, we believe all that God has revealed, may yet reveal, and will yet reveal and in Doctrine and Covenants, things that have never been revealed from the foundation of the world. So we have a lot of scriptural basis for continuing revelation with no precedent.

So just leave that open ended. Let God handle that. You don't need to tell queer people that it's going to be changed in the next life for many reasons. Like I said, first of all, it's not doctrinally based. But more importantly, I think, is that it's just harmful because all that does when you tell a queer person that they're going to be fixed in the next life, is it makes them want to get to the next life faster.

Especially if they're in the beginning stages of their coming to terms with themselves, figuring themselves out. They very likely hate this part of themselves, which is a very sad thing that we need to fix culturally. But if they hate the fact that they're gay, or queer, or transgender, or whatever, and they want to lead what they look at and think is a "normal" life, they want to be fixed, they want to be changed, they want to be normal.

That's the mindset that they're in. And now you're telling them, oh, well, don't worry, after you die you'll be fixed. That just makes them want to take the shortcut to get there. And given the fact that LGBTQ+ youth already have a suicidality rate five times higher than their straight and cisgendered peers, not a position that you want to put a queer kid in.

Sara: No, no. And we need to really take that statistic seriously.

TJ: Yeah, five times.

Sara: And stop trying to explain it away because there's a reason.

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TJ: And a lot of people who are a little bit more homophobic will try to put correlation inside of causation and they'll try to say, "Well, it's because if you're LGBTQ, you're messed up and you're not right in the head, and therefore you're suicidal." No, it's actually because the world tells you that you should hate yourself and that you're abnormal and all this other stuff.

So yeah, that's definitely one to be aware of and just stop saying. Just move away from it. I just actually gave a fireside with Turtle House that actually just aired yesterday where I talked about we need to get more comfortable with the I don't knows in our Gospel, which there are a lot of. And there are a ton of them around LGBTQ issues.

Sara: Yeah, and I will say this is for, because I don't just have LDS listeners. I have listeners from like all faiths.

TJ: Cool, yeah.

Sara: And so of course, all of this applies.

TJ: Yes, this applies to anyone, especially if you're in any conservative community of any religion, or any location, whatever. We need to get more comfortable with I don't know, because we get so comfortable in our certainty that we put a lot of people through a lot of pain.

Sara: Yeah, recently I've thought so much that the opposite of faith isn't doubt, the opposite of faith is certainty. That really when we are certain about things, we're not exercising faith there. Faith is not certainty and never is.

TJ: Yeah.

Sara: The opposite of faith is certainty.

TJ: Yeah, I love that. So yeah, I think that's the last one that I can think of right now.

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Sara: Yeah, that's helpful. That's a lot. Yeah, no, that's a lot, that's really good. Thank you so much. I know that that's just so helpful for so many people.

Is there any other like maybe last message? And then we'll tell people how they can find you and get more help from you. But any last message for someone who is where you were? Like if you're thinking about little TJ, someone struggling with gay porn, looking at, it feeling all this stuff, what would you say to them?

TJ: So when I was at that stage and working with my therapist, this was actually a conversation I had with her. I was so terrified to even ask the question of whether I might be gay or queer or anything because I was terrified of the answer. So I wouldn't even let myself ask the question. And she's the same religion as me and so she asked if I had prayed about it and stuff.

And I was like, no, I don't want to because I'm afraid that the answer is going to be yes, you're gay. And that was something that I just couldn't wrap my brain around. I couldn't even let it be a possibility. And one thing that she said to me was, being afraid to ask the question won't change the answer. Which was a little bit of a wakeup call that I needed because God knew already what the answer was.

And what she really helped me with was understanding, at least in our religious beliefs, that if God exists outside of time in a way that we don't understand, but if past, present, and future are all continuously before him, then God knows right now today, every answer for who you are for the rest of your life. He knows the answers that you're not even willing to ask.

And what she helped me to understand was that if in that moment, if I had ever felt God's love at any point in my life, ever, at that point when I felt His love, He was seeing all of these other things that I was worried would make me unlovable and remove me from Him. And He was still loving me at that previous point.

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And because to Him, that previous point, and the next whatever point, tomorrow, next year, whatever, are the same moment. Therefore, I could know with perfect certainty that when I did ask the question His feelings for me wouldn't change because He already knew the answer when I had felt his love the last time.

Sara: Ooh, that's a little mind trippy.

TJ: Yeah. When you start thinking about the implications of a being who exists outside of our understanding of linear time, it gets a little nuts. But that, for me, was one of the most comforting things because I was able to realize, okay, I'm afraid to even ask if I'm gay because I want the answer to be no. And I'm terrified that the answer is going to be yes, and I'm terrified of what that's going to mean for my life and for everything.

But I was especially terrified of what it meant for being lovable, for being worthy of love, and belonging, and acceptance. And so being able to recognize if, you know, I have felt God's love in the past in my life. I have felt his acceptance of me. And at that point, whatever it was that I felt it, he already knew all this other stuff without me. He knew stuff about me that wasn't even on my radar yet.

And if He loved me, then then He's going to love me now and He's going to love me tomorrow and next year when I ask the question. When I get over that fear, He'll still love me then. And He already knows the answer. I'm the only one who doesn't know it, He already knows. So if the answer is yes, that I am gay, He already knows that. And His feelings for me haven't changed.

Sara: Yeah.

TJ: So that, for me, was a really big eye opening moment because the problem is the shame. The problem is the self-loathing, the problem is the fear, and in a lot of cases justifiable fear that family or friends or church members or whoever will reject you or abandon you or whatever.

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Sara: Anyone who's struggled with pornography will understand, can at least kind of understand that shame.

TJ: Yeah, and even if you're straight looking at porn, you have that same fear of if people find out they're not going to love me anymore.

Sara: Or that I'm unlovable from God.

TJ: Yeah, and so that's one thing that I've talked to a lot of people about, is just that idea of God's relationship with time. That if you've ever felt his love before, then He still knows the future. You'll know that that love doesn't change because for Him, that time that you felt His love before and this time now that you're afraid He doesn't love you, they're the same moment for Him.

Sara: That is so cool. I've never, ever heard that before or thought about that before. That's really powerful.

TJ: Yeah.

Sara: Thank you. Thank you. Okay, now how can people find you? So first off, are you licensed in Utah?

TJ: Yeah, yep. So I am a licensed clinical social worker in the state of Utah. So if anyone is looking for a therapist, Sara obviously does amazing work with coaching and with pornography, especially if you're looking for something more in the therapy realm. I am now open, taking new clients. So yeah, only in the state of Utah at the moment for my licensure.

But I do have something coming up soon that I can't get into too much detail about, but it will allow me to at least give partial therapy resources to people in any location. So if you're not in Utah, still come check it out because that's going to be dropping soon and I'm really, really excited for what we're going to be doing with that.

Sara: Is there an email list? Or like should they follow you on Instagram?

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TJ: I have both, yeah. So you can check me out on Instagram @TJcounseling. My website is TJcounseling.com, and I've got an email list on there that you can sign up for, for when those new resources drop. Or if you'd like to book a session with me, if you're someone in Utah that's looking for some therapy. I do 15 minute consultation calls for free to see if we're a good match, to see if this would be right for you. And then you can schedule either a consultation call or if you just like me, you can just jump right into sessions. And that's all on my website for booking and stuff.

Sara: Very cool, awesome. One of the most beautiful things a coach ever did for me was say, "Hey, I think you should do therapy too, and here's a great EMDR therapist." And doing both of those side by side was really helpful. And so yeah, I want you to use TJ as a part of your team if you're connecting to him. And he is such an amazing resource.

So grateful to have you on the podcast. And I appreciate you being vulnerable and sharing so much about you and your story.

TJ: Of course. Thanks, Sara. I'm so happy to be able to be here to talk about this because it's a subject that I don't think gets to be addressed enough.

Sara: Yeah, cool. All right, well, thank you so much. Go check him out, you guys. Have a great week, we'll talk to you next week. Bye bye.

I want to invite you to come and listen to my free class, How To Overcome Pornography For Good Without Using Willpower. We talk about how to stop giving into urges without pure willpower or relying on phone filters so that you can actually stop wanting pornography.

We talk about how to stop giving up after a few weeks or months. And spoiler alert, the answer isn't have more willpower. And then lastly, we talked about how to make a life without porn easily sustainable and permanent.

If you're trying to quit porn, this class is a game changer. So you can go and sign up at Sarabrewer.com/masterclass and it is totally free.