



Ted Bundy, an infamous serial killer responsible for the murder of as many as 50 young women and girls, granted an interview to psychologist James Dobson just before he was executed on January 24, 1989. In that interview, he described the agony of his addiction to pornography. Bundy goes back to his roots, explaining the development of his compulsive behavior. He reveals his addiction to hardcore pornography and how it fueled the terrible crimes he committed.

James C. Dobson: It is about 2:30 in the afternoon. You are scheduled to be executed tomorrow morning at 7:00, if you don't receive another stay. What is going through your mind? What thoughts have you had in these last few days?

Ted: I won't kid you to say it is something I feel I'm in control of or have come to terms with. It's a moment-by-moment thing. Sometimes I feel very tranquil and other times I don't feel tranquil at all. What's going through my mind right now is to use the minutes and hours I have left as fruitfully as possible. It helps to live in the moment, in the essence that we use it productively. Right now I'm feeling calm, in large part because I'm here with you.

JCD: For the record, you are guilty of killing many women and girls.

Ted: Yes, that's true.

JCD: How did it happen? Take me back. What are the antecedents of the behavior that we've seen? You were raised in what you consider to be a healthy home. You were not physically, sexually or emotionally abused.

Ted: No. And that's part of the tragedy of this whole situation. I grew up in a wonderful home with two dedicated and loving parents, as one of 5 brothers and sisters. We, as children, were the focus of my parent's lives. We regularly attended church. My parents did not drink or smoke or gamble. There was no physical abuse or fighting in the home. I'm not saying it was "Leave it to Beaver", but it was a fine, solid Christian home. I hope no one will try to take the easy way out of this and accuse my family of contributing to this. I know, and I'm trying to tell you as honestly as I know how, what happened.

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As a young boy of 12 or 13, I encountered, outside the home, in the local grocery and drug stores, softcore pornography. Young boys explore the sideways and byways of their neighborhoods, and in our neighborhood, people would dump the garbage. From time to time, we would come across books of a harder nature - more graphic. This also included detective magazines, etc., and I want to emphasize this. The most damaging kind of pornography - and I'm talking from hard, real, personal experience - is that that involves violence and sexual violence. The wedding of those two forces - as I know only too well - brings about behavior that is too terrible to describe.

JCD: Walk me through that. What was going on in your mind at that time?

Ted: Before we go any further, it is important to me that people believe what I'm saying. I'm not blaming pornography. I'm not saying it caused me to go out and do certain things. I take full responsibility for all the things that I've done. That's not the question here. The issue is how this kind of literature contributed and helped mold and shape the kinds of violent behavior.

JCD: It fueled your fantasies.

Ted: In the beginning, it fuels this kind of thought process. Then, at a certain time, it is instrumental in crystallizing it, making it into something that is almost a separate entity inside.

JCD: You had gone about as far as you could go in your own fantasy life, with printed material, photos, videos, etc., and then there was the urge to take that step over to a physical event.

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Ted: Once you become addicted to it, and I look at this as a kind of addiction, you look for more potent, more explicit, more graphic kinds of material. Like an addiction, you keep craving something which is harder and gives you a greater sense of excitement, until you reach the point where the pornography only goes so far - that jumping off point where you begin to think maybe actually doing it will give you that which is just beyond reading about it and looking at it.

JCD: How long did you stay at that point before you actually assaulted someone?

Ted: A couple of years. I was dealing with very strong inhibitions against criminal and violent behavior. That had been conditioned and bred into me from my neighborhood, environment, church, and schools.

I knew it was wrong to think about it, and certainly, to do it was wrong. I was on the edge, and the last vestiges of restraint were being tested constantly, and assailed through the kind of fantasy life that was fueled, largely, by pornography.



JCD: Do you remember what pushed you over that edge? Do you remember the decision to "go for it"? Do you remember where you decided to throw caution to the wind?

Ted: It's a very difficult thing to describe - the sensation of reaching that point where I knew I couldn't control it anymore. The barriers I had learned as a child were not enough to hold me back from seeking out and harming somebody.

JCD: Would it be accurate to call that a sexual frenzy?

Ted: That's one way to describe it - a compulsion, a building up of this destructive energy. Another fact I haven't mentioned is the use of alcohol. In conjunction with my exposure to pornography, alcohol reduced my inhibitions and pornography eroded them further.

JCD: After you committed your first murder, what was the emotional effect? What happened in the days after that?

Ted: Even all these years later, it is difficult to talk about. Reliving it through talking about it is difficult to say the least, but I want you to understand what happened. It was like coming out of some horrible trance or dream. I can only liken it to (and I don't want to overdramatize it) being possessed by something so awful and alien, and the next morning waking up and remembering what happened and realizing that in the eyes of the law, and certainly in the eyes of God, you're responsible. To wake up in the morning and realize what I had done with a clear mind, with all my essential moral and ethical feelings intact, absolutely horrified me.

JCD: You hadn't known you were capable of that before?

Ted: There is no way to describe the brutal urge to do that, and once it has been satisfied, or spent, and that energy level recedes, I became myself again. Basically, I was a normal person.

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Ted: I wasn't some guy hanging out in bars, or a bum. I wasn't a pervert in the sense that people look at somebody and say, "I know there's something wrong with him." I was a normal person. I had good friends. I led a normal life, except for this one, small but very potent and destructive segment that I kept very secret and close to myself. Those of us who have been so influenced by violence in the media, particularly pornographic violence, are not some kind of inherent monsters. We are your sons and husbands. We grew up in regular families. Pornography can reach in and snatch a kid out of any house today. It snatched me out of my home 20 or 30 years ago. As diligent as my parents were, and they were diligent in protecting their children, and as good a Christian home as we had, there is no protection against the kinds of influences that are loose in a society that tolerates....

JCD: Outside these walls, there are several hundred reporters that wanted to talk to you, and you asked me to come because you had something you wanted to say. You feel that hardcore pornography, and the door to it, softcore pornography, is doing untold damage to other people and causing other women to be abused and killed the way you did.

Ted: I'm no social scientist, and I don't pretend to believe what John Q. Citizen thinks about this, but I've lived in prison for a long time now, and I've met a lot of men who were motivated to commit violence. Without exception, every one of them was deeply involved in pornography - deeply consumed by the addiction. The F.B.I.'s own study on serial homicide shows that the most common interest among serial killers is pornographers. It's true.

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JCD: What would your life have been like without that influence?

Ted: I know it would have been far better, not just for me, but for a lot of other people - victims and families. There's no question that it would have been a better life. I'm absolutely certain it would not have involved this kind of violence.

JCD: If I were able to ask the kind of questions that are being asked, one would be, "Are you thinking about all those victims and their families that are so wounded? Years later, their lives aren't normal. They will never be normal. Is there remorse?"

Ted: I know people will accuse me of being self-serving, but through God's help, I have been able to come to the point, much too late, where I can feel the hurt and the pain I am responsible for. Yes. Absolutely! During the past few days, myself and a number of investigators have been talking about unsolved cases - murders I was involved in. It's hard to talk about all these years later, because it revives all the terrible feelings and thoughts that I have steadfastly and diligently dealt with - I think successfully. It has been reopened and I have felt the pain and the horror of that.

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I hope that those who I have caused so much grief, even if they don't believe my expression of sorrow, will believe what I'm saying now; there are those loose in their towns and communities, like me, whose dangerous impulses are being fueled, day in and day out, by violence in the media in its various forms - particularly sexualized violence. What scares me is when I see what's on cable T.V. Some of the violence in the movies that come into homes today is stuff they wouldn't show in X-rated adult theatres 30 years ago.

JCD: The slasher movies?

Ted: That is the most graphic violence on screen, especially when children are unattended or unaware that they could be a Ted Bundy; that they could have a predisposition to that kind of behavior.

JCD: One of the final murders you committed was 12-year-old Kimberly Leach. I think the public outcry is greater there because an innocent child was taken from a playground. What did you feel after that? Were they the normal emotions after that?

Ted: I can't really talk about that right now. It's too painful. I would like to be able to convey to you what that experience is like, but I won't be able to talk about that. I can't begin to understand the pain that the parents of these children and young women that I have harmed feel. And I can't restore much to them, if anything. I won't pretend to, and I don't even expect them to forgive me. I'm not asking for it. That kind of forgiveness is of God; if they have it, they have it, and if they don't, maybe they'll find it someday.

JCD: Do you deserve the punishment the state has inflicted upon you?

Ted: That's a very good question. I don't want to die; I won't kid you. I deserve, certainly, the most extreme punishment society has. And I think society deserves to be protected from me and from others like me. That's for sure. What I hope will come of our discussion is that I think society deserves to be protected from itself. As we have been talking, there are forces at loose in this country, especially this kind of violent pornography, where, on one hand, well-meaning people will condemn the behavior of a Ted Bundy while they're walking past a magazine rack full of the very kinds of things that send young kids down the road to being Ted Bundys. That's the irony.

I'm talking about going beyond retribution, which is what people want with me. There is no way in the world that killing me is going to restore those beautiful children to their parents and correct and soothe the pain. But there are lots of other kids playing in streets around the country today who are going to be dead tomorrow, and the next day, because other young people are reading and seeing the kinds of things that are available in the media today.

JCD: There is tremendous cynicism about you on the outside, I suppose, for good reason. I'm not sure there's anything you could say that people would believe, yet you told me (and I have heard this through our mutual friend, John Tanner) that you have accepted the forgiveness of Jesus Christ and are a follower and believer in Him. Do you draw strength from that as you approach these final hours?

Ted: I do. I can't say that being in the Valley of the Shadow of Death is something I've become all that accustomed to, and that I'm strong and nothing's bothering me. It's no fun. It gets kind of lonely, yet I have to remind myself that every one of us will go through this someday in one way or another.

JCD: It's appointed unto man.

Ted: Countless millions who have walked this earth before us have gone through this, so this is just an experience we all share.

Ted Bundy was executed at 7:15 am the day after this conversation was recorded.