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THE TRIPARTITE IMPACT OF PORNOGRAPHY
CONSUMPTION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH:
BRAIN, BODY, AND BALANCE OF LIFE.

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THE TRIPARTITE IMPACT OF PORNOGRAPHY
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Date _____

To April, my best friend and confidant.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Et al.</i>	<i>and others</i>
<i>CBT-IA</i>	<i>Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Internet Addiction</i>
<i>M/C</i>	<i>A Journal of Media and Culture</i>
<i>MIT</i>	<i>Massachusetts Institute of Technology</i>
<i>MLB</i>	<i>Major League Baseball</i>
<i>NCBI</i>	<i>National Center for Biotechnology Information</i>

PREFACE

The submission of this thesis project marks a unique journey in my seminary education. Upon completion of my Master of Divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, I felt called to dive more deeply into the rich mines of rigorous theological education. The following project may consist of my thoughts and words, but I would not have been able to compile one sentence without the help and encouragement from the following people.

To Dr. Andrew T. Walker, of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, thank you for your humility in serving as my project advisor. The personal accessibility you have afforded me has given me great confidence. You truly are a master at your craft.

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To Dr. William T. Smith, thank you for showing me two specific things that have aided in my education. Firstly, thank you for showing, by example, that guessing is unnecessary. Hard work and resolve can reveal even the trickiest of answers. Secondly, thank you for showing me that striving to do things well goes beyond personal benefit. When we do things well, everyone benefits, and God receives His glory due.

I rarely go a week without realizing, by the grace of God, the incredible support my family has afforded me as I labor away in my study. My parents, who raised me in the ways of the Lord (see Prov. 22:6)—thank you for standing beside me as I answered the call to ministry. I do not know where I would be today without the constant love and support you have shown me my whole life. To my brother, Jason, thank you for being the man I wish I could be most days. To my best friend, Alex, thank you for always challenging me to explain myself well. To my church, First Baptist Church of Ocean Springs, Mississippi, thank you for allowing me to dedicate serious time away from ministry to pursue academic excellence.

Lastly, but certainly not of least regard, I must thank my wife, April. You have never ceased to encourage me. There have been dark days when the cloud of due dates hung heavily over my head. I know that, ultimately, the stress I endured also affected you. Thank you for sacrificing all that you have so that I can pursue theological education. You point me to Christ. I promise to always love you as much as I possibly can.

To God alone be the glory. To you I do owe all that I have. You have given to me far more than I ever deserved. Wherever these words go, or fail to go, may you, God, go before them so that someone might come to know your saving grace through even those most broken of words.

Michael Cole Andrews

Ocean Springs, Mississippi

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.” – Genesis 3:7¹

Humanity wants to cover up its nakedness. There is an intrinsic vulnerability that seems to exist when our bare bodies are visible, even if visible to those we trust most deeply. Even cultural subgroups of people who physically bare more than most still believe in covering what is most intimate due to the dangerous objectifications that tend to be hurled at the immodestly dressed.² From the perspective of Christianity, humanity covers up to embrace the principle of God-honoring modesty (Deut 22:5; Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 6:19–20,10:31; 1 Pet 3:3-4). Even outside of Christendom, humanity remains aware of the intrusive reality of nakedness. People may toe the moral line of what is and what is not modest, but very few people—in a culture that does involve the expectation of covering one’s self, especially in intimate areas—willingly expose themselves to the viewership of others. This particular area, the willing exposure, is where pornography thrives.

It could be said that this willing and direct exposure is pornography defined and personified. The capitalization of exposing humanity’s intimate bodies to vast amounts of viewers for the benefit of stimulation is the pornographic machine synthesized. Our eyes have been opened, and we *know* when we see another human being

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

² Bhuvanesh Awasthi, “From Attire to Assault: Clothing, Objectification, and De-Humanization – a Possible Prelude to Sexual Violence?,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (October 2017), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00338>.

naked. The cultural problem that currently exists is the powerful impact upon humanity that occurs when people willingly engage in the exploitation of nakedness for the sake of pleasure.

Thesis

I will argue in this thesis that the consumption of pornography is detrimental to the human experience in at least three knowable ways.³ First, when viewing pornography the brain receives and reacts to this explicitly exotic material in a fashion similar to substance abuse issues. Continual exposure to and consumption of pornography will rewire and remap the brain's pleasure center. Second, because God created the human body and spirit as one harmonious entity, I will argue that the *affected* brain appropriately *affects* the body.⁴ When the brain is rewired to seek unhealthy amounts of pleasure, the body also reacts in manners that are damaging. Finally, I will argue that the brain and body, once negatively impacted by pornography consumption, will work in unison, as originally designed, but in a manner that is detrimental, to disrupt the balance of life. In this arena of study, the balance of life is most negatively affected by the patterns of addiction.

Methodology

As a work of practical theology, with a focus on Christian ethics, my thesis will aim to remain faithful to the following vows:

Divine designer. In the opening chapters of the Bible, in Genesis 1, there are at least thirty-eight verbs attributed to the subject (God) with regards to creation. It is

³ For the sake of this project, I will be defining pornography as any material, through any medium, that contains the explicit depiction of sexual behavior and or activities with the intention to bring about arousal and or pleasure.

⁴ I draw my exposition on this matter from Genesis 1:27. If we truly are image bearers of the Triune God, I believe it is fair to assume that, like the divine essence of the Trinity, our bodies are designed to work in harmonious efforts, even as they are tainted by the impact of sin.

faithful to honor God as the sole Creator of all things (John 1:3), including the human brain and body.

Divine sexuality. Throughout Scripture, we see that God designed sexual behavior to serve the main purposes bestowed at creation (i.e., multiplication). While physical and emotional pleasure have their places in sexuality, multiplication remains the priority of sex as explained in Scripture. I will remain convicted that pornography, and its various expressions, are a perversion of God's original design.⁵

Divine decisions. From the perspective of practical theology, I believe that Scripture teaches that we, as created beings, are equipped with the ability to make decisions that honor and please God (Col 3:17). Furthermore, the context of sexual immorality is mentioned heavily in the New Testament. At no point is a reader instructed to engage in sexual sin, but often words such as “abstain, do not act, do not associate, flee” are mentioned as strong rebukes of sexual sin.⁶ I will hold true to the belief that we can choose, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God, to not actively engage with pornography in its various forms.

Divine community. I will hold fast to the assumption, as expressed in Scripture, that the body of Christ is designed to exist in safe, open, God-honoring communities.⁷ Pornography seems to be, due to its inherently sinful nature, utterly isolating and an intense producer of personal shame. Therefore, a biblical Christian community is one that rejects pornography, as with all sin, because it serves as a serious hurdle to “the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:16b).

⁵ While secular culture may reject expressions of sexuality in a PG-13 movie as pornography, it is without a doubt fair to state that our culture grows ever more pornographic in nature. While hardcore pornography remains on lurid websites for the most part, graphic expressions of sexual activity are common among major television shows and movies.

⁶ See Paul's letters to the church in Corinth for the above-mentioned words.

⁷ Open in the sense of James 5:16. A community where believers can come to trust individuals, and by the grace present through Christ Jesus, confess our sins to one another as we confess to the Father.

Summary of Research

The following project will cross between the fields of ethics, neuroscience, psychology, and also practical theology. Pornography is a far-reaching medium that has devastating effects on all that it touches. I am not the first, nor will I be the last, to offer a Christian response to the pervasive problem of pornography. However, my engagement will be limited to a few specific areas. First, the scientific field of neuroscience is vast. I will only be considering the most basic aspects of neuroscience with regards to the brain's reaction to, and potential chemical dependence upon, pornography. Second, much of the Christian response to the problem of pornography is devotional in matter. While I will offer a Christian perspective to end the work, the aim of this project is to address a serious tripartite issue that begins at the individual level and works outward to impact local congregations. I am not seeking to address significant ways and means in which pornography can be overcome, as a personal addiction or cultural problem.

Significance

The brain, body, and balance of life are essential works of the Christian life. When the works of the Christian life are effected so too is the local body of believers (i.e., the local church). At each level, the effect of pornography consumption should be weighed and viewed with somber urgency. It is my observation that, for most church congregations, Christians are unprepared and too uncomfortable to tackle the serious problem of pornography consumption. For the sake of our integrity, it seems that we ignore this issue with the hope that it will simply dissipate. There are serious issues abounding when pornography consumption runs rampant, and the local church is not unaffected by this plague of perversion. Some data shows that 68% of church going men and over 50% of pastors view porn on a regular basis.⁸ The following project will thus

⁸ Jeremy Wiles, "15 Mind-Blowing Statistics about Pornography and the Church," Conqueror Series (KingdomWorks Studios, May 5 2022). <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/15-mind-blwing-statistics-about-pornography-and-the-church>.

hopefully serve as a wakeup call to the local church. We must be willing to look beyond our projected cleanliness and embrace the tripartite impact of pornography consumption.

CHAPTER 2

PORNOGRAPHY'S IMPACT ON THE BRAIN

A Brief Introduction to Neuroscience with Jerry Seinfeld

In the summer of 1989, Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld introduced audiences worldwide to a group of New York City friends searching for purpose across the vast mundanity of daily life. *Seinfeld* (the show) tackled complex topics across its storied nine-season run, although if not entirely from a secular view point. Some of the most challenging philosophical questions posed by David and Seinfeld were insightfully covered over by the intentional humor of the show. One particular episode, “The Nose Job,” tackles the quarreling duality that occurs between the brain and the body when dealing with sexual urges and lust. George Constanza (Jason Alexander) and Jerry are at their usual diner discussing women:

Jerry: Please, please, Isabel? She is the most despicable woman I have ever met in my life. I have never been so repulsed by someone mentally and so attracted to them physically at the same time. It's like my brain is facing my penis in a chess game. And I'm letting him win.

George: You're not letting him win. He wins till you're forty.

Jerry: Then what?

George: He still wins but it's not a blowout.

Jerry: She wants to be an actress. She makes me read these moronic acting scenes with her, and I do it because I'm so addicted to the sex, I'm helpless, I'll do anything. So finally Kramer comes in the other day.

(flashback to Kramer and Jerry in Jerry's apartment)

Jerry (holding up a piece of paper): I don't want to see this woman anymore but I haven't got the will power to throw out her number. Please, help me. Help me.

Kramer (taking the paper and tearing it to pieces): I'm proud of you.
(end of flashback)

Jerry: So I'm never gonna [sic] see her again, I'm going cold turkey.

George: Good for you.

Jerry: I'll tell you, the sex. . . I mean, I was like an animal. I mean it was

just completely uninhibited.

George: It's like going to the bathroom in front of a lot of people and not caring.

Jerry: It's not like that at all.¹

In the middle of the episode, a comedic glimpse of Jerry's mind is played out between two Jerrys (one sexual, one analytical) engaging in a chess match. These two parts of the same whole wage war against one another for priority. Eventually, Jerry cracks under pressure and begs his neighbor, Kramer, to return the shredded phone number so that Jerry can reach Isabel. This episode of *Seinfeld* simultaneously introduces two complicated matters, with one being explained well and the other being rashly glossed over. The struggle with sexual addiction and lust is real. Jerry knows he is negatively impacted by his addiction to having sex, and, furthermore, by his desires to have sex where no intention for a lasting relationship is present (as he detests Isabel as a person, yet yearns for Isabel as a body). Yet where *Seinfeld* (both the show and its creators) fails is in the arena of neuroscience. The show fails to see that, as worded by the software company Covenant Eyes, "the brain is where we truly experience intimacy, pleasure, love, and satisfaction. But it is also where we create negative feelings, bad habits, destructive compulsions, and addictions."² The broad study of neuroscience helps to understand, and push forward, the reality of the inseparable connection that exists between our brains and bodies when we engage in sexual behaviors of any kind. The battle Jerry was facing wasn't between two different parts of his body: it was occurring entirely within the confines of the human brain, which is precisely where the study of neuroscience takes place.

The Department of Neuroscience at Georgetown University defines the discipline as "any or all the sciences, such as neurochemistry and experimental

¹ *Seinfeld*, season 3, episode 9, "The Nose Job," aired November 20, 1991 on NBC, <https://www.seinfeldscripts.com/TheNoseJob.html>

² Sam Black, *The Porn Circuit: Understand Your Brain and Break Porn Habits in 90 Days*, (Owosso, MI: Covenant Eyes, 2021), 6.

psychology, which deal with the structure or function of the nervous system and brain.”³ Like most scientific endeavors, neuroscience attempts to successfully bridge gaps between what is normal/abnormal, known/unknown, and plausible/improbable within the realm of brain activity.⁴ Neuroscience can also act as the convincing conduit by which pornography consumption can be better understood in terms of the determinantal effects on the brain of the consumer.⁵ The brain acts as a supercomputer that hosts the ability to store thousands of differing experiences. Our brain is designed to respond positively to sexuality. However, there are confines and limitations to this unique design and pornography ventures beyond these healthy boundaries within the first couple of viewings. But what is actually occurring in the brain when one engages with pornography? The answer is surprisingly straightforward.

A Divine Design for Desire

“Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” – Genesis 2:7

The creation account of the Bible (Gen 1–3) is often misunderstood and misquoted. People may also miss the forest for the trees by not *seeing* and *understanding* that God’s prize of creation was/is us, the created. While debating the details is both fun and necessary, the Bible must be seen through the lens of God desiring to connect, and be

³ Department of Neuroscience, “About Neuroscience,” Georgetown University, February 5, 2020, <https://neuro.georgetown.edu/about-neuroscience/>.

⁴ It should be noted that oftentimes the terms “brain” and “mind” are used interchangeably. It is my opinion that such fluid use of terms is irresponsible. The brain is a complex organ whereas the mind exists, from the Christian perspective, in a realm that is spiritual (i.e., unseen). While the brain exerts great impact on behavior and cognitive functions, it remains physically located inside of our skulls and within our heads. The mind, however, exists outside such parameters and is able to engage both the brain and the body simultaneously. For the purposes of this thesis, the term “brain” will refer solely to the complex organ that regulates our bodily processes.

⁵ There are more expansive fields within the scope of neuroscience (e.g., cognitive neuroscience, molecular neuroscience, neuroplasticity, etc.). For the sake of brevity, and due to my lack of training in the hard sciences, this project will only focus on the discipline as a whole with specific relation to the brain and sexual activity.

in union, with His creation. Furthermore, many people quote from Genesis with regards to God’s review of His creation, and state that God “said it was good.” The Hebrew word used in Genesis 1 is *wayyiqtol* (וַיִּרְאֶה), which means “see; understand; spy, reveal, look at, examine.”⁶ God did not say that it, His creation, was good. God *saw* that His creation was good. In ways that are above the human ability to remark upon, God perceived that what He created was good and beautiful.

To be human is to be created in the image of God.⁷ No one that is human (i.e., all people past, present, and future) fails to be born in the image of God. It is not a choice that we, as the created make, but one that the Creator chose for us. The inspired hand of God allows for differences at birth, yet humanity remains united in its reality as created being and not Creator (Gen 1:26, Col 1:16-17). Within this intelligent design exists God’s divine design for His creation. Humanity is good—not in the sense of morality, but in the sense that God achieved and accomplished His desired design for humanity.⁸ This means that in some fashion, as image bearers, we act as sub-creators on Earth as we engage with our God-given abilities to practice dominion. We too can perceive things as beautiful and good. This unique ability to perceive is planted solely within the confines of the brain.⁹ Humans do have a host of senses that serve to increase the ability to perceive correctly, yet the brain remains the interpreter of all situations.¹⁰ The brain, according to its design,

⁶ Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, “ר,” in *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of The Old Testament*, trans. and ed. M.E.J. Richardson (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), Logos Bible Software 9.

⁷ For the sake of this project, an image bearer is a created ambassador that is to live by a set of moral standards, as defined by God himself, for the sake of drawing near to and glorifying God. To be an image bearer is one part created inheritance and one part redeemed (i.e., justified).

⁸ Romans 3:23 tells of how all peoples have fallen short of the glory of God by choosing to sin.

⁹ I also believe that the human ability to perceive is one of the most interesting distinctions that separates us from the remainder of God’s creation. Animals seem to be able to be proactive and reactive, yet they do not have the ability to hold two opposing thoughts in limbo until a decision is made. Perception gives humanity the unique ability to act in accordance with its ever-changing lists of desire. I would include this ability, along with others, as the distinction present in Genesis as God breathing the “breath of life,” into us. We do not see the life breath of God given to anyone or anything else in Scripture.

¹⁰ My high-school baseball coach could not taste due to injuries sustained in a car crash. Yet he

stores information from millions of different situations, instances, and experiences all simultaneously, while its host, the created, lives its life.¹¹ This storage of information develops into a database over time, so as not to overload the brain with tasks that are regularly completed.¹² Driving on the interstate is likely frightening the first time one merges into high-speed traffic, with the speed of other drivers, the different sizes of vehicles, and the constant changing of lanes. Yet eventually, over time, automated responses in the brain replace the need to be on constant alert and one drives with ease even in the most seemingly tense of situations. These databases become neural pathways (e.g., like the interstate) where information travels effortlessly, and quickly, to its final destination. Neural pathways are defined as “a series of connected nerves along which electrical impulses travel in the body.”¹³ All of these decisions of concentrated electrical action, whether completed manually or by automation, occur on a neurochemical level that is designed to expend the brain’s energy in the most efficient manner possible.¹⁴ Per God’s design, these chemicals remain in balance (i.e., homeostasis) to support healthy lifestyles and useful choices that will, hopefully, produce a longer and healthy life.¹⁵ The brain chooses not to waste its energy on repetitive learned motions. For example, by the time we are adults, we no longer exert brain power when tying our shoes, holding various

was still able to perceive what he ate, due to his ability to see what he was eating. But this original information (types of food, etc.) was stored within the brain, because the brain correctly interpreted and perceived what is true.

¹¹ Paul Reber, “What Is the Memory Capacity of the Human Brain?” *Scientific American*, May 1, 2010, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-is-the-memory-capacity/>.

¹² Deniz Vatansever, David K. Menon, and Emmanuel A. Stamatakis, “Default Mode Contributions to Automated Information Processing,” *Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 48 (2017): 12821–25, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1710521114>.

¹³ “Neural Pathway Definition & Meaning,” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/neural%pathway>.

¹⁴ Nobuhiro Hagura, Patrick Haggard, and Jörn Diedrichsen, “Perceptual Decisions Are Biased by the Cost to Act,” *eLife* 6 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.7554/elife.18422>.

¹⁵ Janet A. Best, H Frederik Nijhout, and Michael C Reed, “Homeostatic Mechanisms in Dopamine Synthesis and Release: A Mathematical Model,” *Theoretical Biology and Medical Modelling* 6, no. 1 (2009):, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1742-4682-6-21>.

items like a toothbrush, and constructing sentences in fluid conversations. It is useful, however, to look more closely at the brain chemistry that is produced when a decision has to be made, coupled with an increased level of external stimuli.

The Chemistry of the Brain

As author Sam Black states, “brain chemistry plays a major role in creating neural pathways that establish patterns of behavior and triggers that spark a person to engage in specific behavior.”¹⁶ There are seven chemicals that play an important role in understanding the internal pressures that are caused by an external viewing of pornography.¹⁷ Looking at each one in depth will serve to build a fuller picture of what occurs in the brain viewing pornography.

Dopamine

According to the publishing arm of Harvard Medical School, “dopamine is most notably involved in helping us feel pleasure as part of the brain’s reward system. Sex, shopping, smelling cookies baking in the oven—all these things can trigger dopamine release, or a dopamine rush.”¹⁸ Playing a major role in memory retention, dopamine is responsible for cueing our brain, in various circumstances, to render the proper stimulus response. If Jerry Seinfeld found his date, Isabel, to be intellectually repulsive, his brain strictly remembered, thanks to dopamine, how Isabel was overwhelmingly interesting from a sexual point of view. Returning to that sitcom scene discussed above, Jerry believes he is arguing with his anatomy. But in fact he is debating the powerful force of dopamine that is coursing through his brain, reliant upon previous experiences with Isabel, to trigger a reward in Jerry’s brain that will, in the end, assist in

¹⁶ Black, *Porn Circuit*, 10.

¹⁷ It should be noted that this list of chemicals that are active within the brain is not exhaustive.

¹⁸ Stephanie Watson, “Dopamine: The Pathway to Pleasure,” *Harvard Health*, July 20, 2021, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/dopamine-the-pathway-to-pleasure> .

engaging in more sexual activity with Isabel. Friend or foe, dopamine remains one of the most powerful chemicals within the human brain.

Testosterone

Around the time of *Seinfeld*'s end, in *Long Gone Summer* Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa traded home runs in a historic race to rewrite baseball's history books. An incredible season ended in 1998 with McGwire hitting his 62nd home run to break the record previously held by Roger Maris. Nowadays, most look back on this error of baseball as one riddled with steroid abuse. People often associate testosterone and steroids strictly with aiding strength and physical appearance;¹⁹ testosterone, however, plays a large role in sexual cues and sexual activity.

When pornography feeds the brain with excess dopamine, the brain responds to this sexual cue by generating testosterone which, in turn, increases production within the male testes. Excess levels of testosterone and teste production tricks the brain into "interpreting any signal (external or internal) and ramping up the perceived need for sexual activity."²⁰ As McGwire and Sosa were yearning to break the single season home run record, it was likely that most pitches, whether a strike or a ball, were interpreted as the potential record breaker. In the same manner, this overly high level of testosterone puts the brain's sexual awareness center on overdrive.²¹ Sammy Sosa struck out 171 times in 1998.²² Out the league's history of 20,000 players, Sosa ranks 112th for single

¹⁹ National Institutes of Health, "Introduction," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, August 3, 2021, <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/steroids-other-appearance-performance-enhancing-drugs-apeds/introduction>.

²⁰ Black, *Porn Circuit*, 11.

²¹ Leander van der Meij, et al, "Men with Elevated Testosterone Levels Show More Affiliative Behaviours during Interactions with Women," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 279, no. 1726 (2011): 202–8, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2011.0764>.

²² "Single-Season Leaders & Records for Strikeouts," Baseball Reference, accessed September 21, 2022, https://www.baseball-reference.com/leaders/SO_season.shtml.

season strikeouts.²³ Every pitched looked like a home run, and he swung. The chemical imbalances brought about by pornography cause the brain to be “behind in the count,” on a regular basis by seeing the world through an ever increasing lens of sexual pleasures to be had.

Norepinephrine

Mental health counselor Mark B. Kastleman states, in his book *The Drug of the New Millennium: The Brain Science Behind Internet Pornography*, that

Once a person has used Internet [sic] pornography as the means to heighten his or her sexual fantasies, all he or she need do in order to call up those same feelings and images is express the desire or intention. Once this intention or desire is expressed, a whole network of cellular-memory groups is activated.²⁴

One major chemical reaction in this memory group is norepinephrine. This chemical is also associated with what is commonly known as our fight or flight response. Sam Black states, “whether it’s a wonderful sexual experience. . .or a provocative sexual image, the information is stored for easy recall with the help of norepinephrine.”²⁵ Pornography misuses our ability to remember things well. It’s not just on the superficial level that pornography works against its end user, but at the very depths of the brain’s function, pornography is holding the brain hostage to its will. Norepinephrine can create “cellular-memory groups” that last a lifetime. The words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 speak loudly towards this brain chemical as one that works against holiness. Norepinephrine seems to act like the consequence of “sins against his own body” (1 Cor 6:18). When this memory group is wholly associated with pornography of sexually illicit behavior, then a problem worth addressing has established itself within the brain.

²³ “MLB Is Closing in on its 20,000th Player, and We’re Counting Them Down,” FOX Sports, July 21, 2021, <https://www.foxsports.com/stories/mlb/20000-players-countdown-major-league-debuts>.

²⁴ Mark B. Kastleman, *The Drug of the New Millennium* (Orem, UT: PowerThink Publishing, 2001), 83.

²⁵ Black, *Porn Circuit*, 11.

Oxytocin and Vasopressin

Known as the “love hormone,” oxytocin “can help us bond with loved ones and can be released through touch, music and exercise.”²⁶ A bond is something that is used to physically tie or bind things together. An emotional bond works in the same manner. Sexual activity, as defined in Genesis 2:24, is the ultimate bonding of two into one as according to God’s holy design. The Hebrew word for become is *hyh* (הָיָה). *Hyh* means “to come to pass, occur, happen.”²⁷ As a matter of faith and conviction, oxytocin is the binding hormone because God created it for such a purpose. The history of the study of oxytocin has shown the large role the chemical plays during sexual bonding and within the sexual climax.²⁸ As one can deduct from Genesis 2:24, sexual bonding is to occur within the confines of heterosexual, monogamous marriage. An increase in oxytocin, due to the results of pornography, is harmful towards the consumers’ ability to empathize.²⁹ If oxytocin is meant to play a large role within a healthy marriage, then pornography serves as a severing blow on the bridge to healthy relationships. If a human is constantly *bonding* with images and people who are strangers, then its ability to then bond with real people, in manners that are vulnerable, seems to be heavily affected by the constant use of pornography.

Like oxytocin, the chemical vasopressin assists in further strengthening concentrations of attraction among partners. In lay terms, vasopressin is going to help my brain confirm my desired attraction within a potential mate, partner. Yet when the partner

²⁶ Watson, “Oxytocin: The Love Hormone,” *Harvard Health*, July 20, 2021, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/oxytocin-the-love-hormone>.

²⁷ Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, “הָיָה,” in *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of The Old Testament*, trans. and ed. M.E.J. Richardson (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), Logos Bible Software 9.

²⁸ Navneet Magon and Sanjay Kalra, “The Orgasmic History of Oxytocin: Love, Lust, and Labor,” *Indian Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism* 15, no. 7 (2011): 156, <https://doi.org/10.4103/2230-8210.84851>.

²⁹ Ariel Kor, et al., “Alterations in Oxytocin and Vasopressin in Men with Problematic Pornography Use: The Role of Empathy,” *Journal of Behavioral Addictions* 11, no. 1 (2022): 116–27, <https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.2021.00089>.

becomes the artificial broker that is pornography, vasopressin is chemically unable to identify the difference between what the brain and body are experiencing through the stimulus. Like a bait and switch, pornography supplies the brain with the cue of a naked body that looks to be placed in reality yet remains wholly in a land of fabrication.

Vasopressin notes attachment and essentially sends reinforcement signals to strengthen the level of overall attachment. Thus attachment, from the standpoint of the brain, occurs on two levels simultaneously. First, humanity experiences increased levels of attachment between one another due to the increased presence of oxytocin and vasopressin. Second, the brain exerts attachment dominance towards behaviors that encourage increased levels of oxytocin and vasopressin. Without conscious knowledge of its own actions, the brain begins to work in a cycle that instigates and encourages pornography use.

Endogenous Opiates

“Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.” – Genesis 24:67

God, in his divine grace, created the act of sexual intercourse for multiplication (Gen 1:28) first and for physical satisfaction second. In both designs, God divinely concocted responses that support biblical sexual behavior found within holy marriages. Behaviors that when wisely reproduced glorify God rather than producing harm to the body and brain. First, multiplication produces children and “children are a gift from the Lord; the fruit of the womb a reward” (Ps 127:3). Second, “people were designed to have an amazing sexual experience.”³⁰

For something to be endogenous, it must occur within, or have an origin point inside the body. Opiates are often, and appropriately, associated with addiction in 2022.

³⁰ Black, *Porn Circuit*, 11.

There are both synthetic (i.e., fentanyl) and natural (i.e., morphine) opiates available today. Most commonly opioids are used to treat and block pain signals within the body.³¹ But what do opioids have to do with sexual activity? “The created body produces. . .endogenous opiates, which during climax provide pain relief and a sense of transcendence and euphoria.”³²

In the *Archives of Medical Research*, researchers used the lifesaving medication *naltrexone* was used to antagonize opiate receptors in the body while men engaged in regular sexual activity. Naltrexone binds and blocks opioid receptors, reducing the craving for opioids.³³ The men were encouraged to view sexually explicit videos and attempt to reach a recorded climax as many times as desired within two hours. The research was aimed to gauge the, “number of orgasms, intensity of sexual arousal, and orgasmic intensity.” The researchers were aiming to determine the role of endogenous opiates within sexual activity.³⁴

By using naltrexone to block receptors, the researchers could see whether or not endogenous opiates temper physical responses to the intensity of sexual activity within men. The researchers found, “evidence that endogenous opioids modulate orgasmic response and the perceived intensity of sexual arousal and orgasm in men.”³⁵ The research also concluded that naltrexone could be useful for treatments of erectile dysfunction and inhibited sexual desire. Endogenous opiates are meant to regulate our

³¹ Benjamin Butanis, “What Are Opioids?,” Johns Hopkins Medicine, based in Baltimore, Maryland, April 30, 2018, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/opioids/what-are-opioids.html>.

³² Black, *Porn Circuit*, 11.

³³ “Naltrexone,” SAMHSA, September 12, 2022, <https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment/medications-counseling-related-conditions/naltrexone>.

³⁴ Rajendra S Sathe et al., “Naltrexone-Induced Augmentation of Sexual Response in Men,” *Archives of Medical Research* 32, no. 3 (2001): pp. 221-226, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0188-4409\(01\)00279-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0188-4409(01)00279-x).

³⁵ Rajendra, et al., “Naltrexone-Induced Augmentation of Sexual Response in Men,” pp. 221-226.

physical feelings that occur after sexual activity. Unlike the sinful abuse of opioids, endogenous opiates were designed, by God, to solidify the intimacy our soul feels within a God-ordained sexual relationship, in the physical realm of our created bodies.

Serotonin

The last chemical, serotonin, is also the tail end of the chemical experience that takes place within the brain. If dopamine is the supercharged starter, then serotonin is for bringing things to a contented and comforting conclusion. Author Andy Naselli states, “indulging in pornography is immediately pleasurable, but that pleasure is fleeting. It’s like eating a sugar-coated poison pill.”³⁶ Serotonin is responsible for some of the feelings of immediate pleasure.³⁷ Upon the completion of sexual relationships, most people feel calmed and relaxed. This release of serotonin conditions both the body and brain to associate this calmness with acts of sexuality. The poison pill of pornography uses serotonin to momentarily relax or calm the brain and body. Unlike healthy and holy marriages, the conclusion of sexually immoral acts usually brings about guilt, shame, and regret. The working order of the brain’s chemistry contributes, or counteracts, the body’s normal working order (which will be shown in the following chapter). What is most immediately troubling is how these chemical agents within the brain can serve as agents of change. The problem caused to the brain by pornography consumption occurs when the act of pursuing pornography becomes, by rewiring the internal mapping of our brains, habitual in nature.³⁸

³⁶ Jonathan Leeman, *The Pastor and Pornography* (Washington, DC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 9.

³⁷ I had a difficult time discerning, via research, how long serotonin exists in elevated levels within the brain. I did find that the extreme, serotonin syndrome, or extremely high levels of serotonin, can occur due to problematic drug interactions and become fatal if not treated promptly. A lack of serotonin, or low levels of serotonin, called serotonin deficiency, can also become troubling for a person’s mental health (i.e., mood instability, depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, memory issues, healthy sexual function, attention). Physical health symptoms can also occur.

³⁸ Peter Sterling and Simon Laughlin, *Principles of Neural Design* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017).

Acquiring New Tastes

Neuroplasticity can be viewed as sub-discipline within the field of neuroscience. The human brain changes significantly from the infant stage to roughly the middle-20s.³⁹ However, neuroplasticity and developmental changes are not one and the same category. Neuroplasticity is defined as “a process that involves adaptive structural and functional change to the brain.”⁴⁰ Development, or growth, on the other hand, reaches a termination date, a locus of completion. No human continues to grow in height until they die. The brain also reaches its limitation in its physical form. Neuroplasticity, however, can continue on well into adulthood.⁴¹ Psychologist Mona Fishbane states,

The adult brain can create new neuronal connections and even new neurons born from neuronal stem cells. In addition to these gray matter (neuronal) changes, there can be change in our white matter, the pathways between neurons and the myelin that allows neurons to communicate efficiently.⁴²

Neuroplasticity allows our brain to acquire new tastes throughout life. The problem caused by pornography, due to its forceful stimulating intentions, is that the brain is not able to differentiate this new taste as one that is ultimately bitter. It views pornography as the same as a healthy sexual relationship. For those who morally do not oppose pornography, the fact that the brain is unable to differentiate between digital representations of sexuality and authentic healthy relationships should serve as the catalyst for challenging this sinful medium.

Steven Pace serves as Associate Professor in the School of Education and the

³⁹ National Institute of Mental Health, “The Teen Brain: 7 Things to Know,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-teen-brain-7-things-to-know>.

⁴⁰ “Neuroplasticity - Statpearls - NCBI Bookshelf,” accessed September 12, 2022, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK557811/>.

⁴¹ Neurons act as the great information exchangers within the brain. Using electrical impulse and chemical signaling, neurons transmit data between different areas of the brain, and also between the brain and the rest of the body. Without neurons, not much of what we do and/or feel would be recognized by the brain.

⁴² Mona D. Fishbane, “Change Is a Choice: Nurturing Neuroplasticity in Your Life,” GoodTherapy.org Therapy Blog, October 17, 2017, <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/change-is-a-choice-nurturing-neuroplasticity-in-your-life-0930154>.

Arts at Central Queensland University in Australia. His study, “Acquiring Tastes through Online Activity: Neuroplasticity and the Flow of Experiences of Web Users,” speaks clearly to the powers of the brain’s ability to adapt. Pace, in speaking about Norman Doidge’s therapy practice, stated the following:

The sexual excitement of viewing pornography releases a chemical neurotransmitter named dopamine that activates the brain’s pleasure centres. Since neurons that fire together wire together, the repeated viewing of pornography effectivity wires the pornographic images into the pleasure centres of the brain with the focused attention required for neuroplastic change. In other words, habitual viewers of pornography develop new brain maps based on the photos and videos they see. And since the brain operates on a use it or lose principle, they long to keep those new maps activated. Consequently, pornography has an addictive power. Like all addicts, the men who Doidge treated developed a tolerance to the photos and videos they overserved and sought out progressively higher levels of stimulation.”⁴³

In accordance with the principle of tolerance, once the brain is re-mapped for the sake of priority it will then require more explicit and ultimately more damaging forms of pornography to feel satisfied. Consumers move from the normative sexual experience to an experience that is entirely novel and based wholly upon representations seen on a silver screen. While acquiring this new taste may seem novel or exciting, it will in turn eventually destroy the sense of satisfaction altogether in the brain, body, and life of the consumer.

An Inability to Taste and See

“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!— Psalm 34:8

The brain rewired for evil cannot see God (Matt 5:8). It has become impure, significantly tainted by the world. Those that undergo traumatic brain injuries can lose their sense of smell and taste.⁴⁴ Although pornography doesn’t physically damage the

⁴³ Steven Pace, “Acquiring Tastes through Online Activity: Neuroplasticity and the Flow Experiences of Web Users,” *M/C Journal* 17, no. 1 (2014): <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.773>.

⁴⁴ “Loss of Smell or Taste after Traumatic Brain Injury,” Loss of Smell or Taste After Traumatic Brain Injury | Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (MSKTC), June 6, 2022, <https://msktc.org/tbi/factsheets/loss-smell-or-taste-after-traumatic-brain-injury>.

brain like a car accident, pornography does traumatically impact the brain's spiritual sense to taste and see that God, His ways, and His Word are good. Pornography changes what we like, what we yearn to taste, into a bitter offering that ultimately kills our ability to taste at all. Pornography, being the work of Satan himself, doesn't stop at just killing or numbing the senses. Pornography goes for the kill every time and the conscience is square in its sights once the senses are dulled.

Discussing those who will depart from the faith, Paul mentions that the conscience can become seared (1 Tim 4:2). The Greek word here *kausōn* (καύσων) translates into English as "scorching heat."⁴⁵ Under the pressure of pornography, the conscience submits to the explicit temptation and eventually melts away. Paul is warning that such a heat can forever transform the intended design for our conscience (that of useful conviction). The brain is a precious gift from God. The brain is to be treasured and stewarded well in the presence of endless temptation. Even though pornography consumption and addiction are powerful, the Creator of the brain, God himself, will take the final word.

God on the Brain

Secular science has, and always will, have much to contribute to and say about neuroscience. The secular point of view explains for the incredible intricacies and powerful functions of the brain, yet fails to recognize the intelligent design found within all things, much less the brain.⁴⁶ Furthermore, secular science does not have much to say on the topic of forgiveness and redemption, two topics that serve as core tenets of the Christian faith. The Christian perspective is thus necessary for a twofold reason. One, the

⁴⁵ Swanson, James, "Ππ," in the *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Louisville, CO: Oak Harbor, 1997) Logos Bible Software 9.

⁴⁶ For intelligent design, I am referring to both God and the Bible (His Word) as the foundation of all science, scientific thinking, and scientific discovery. Far beyond just admitting the complexities present, I believe our created order points to a divine Creator, which is God.

brain is a created portion of the human being who was made in the image of God. All of our functions and capabilities do not make us God, but like Him in image. Two, the overarching narrative of the Bible is reconciliation and redemption. Therefore, even when the brain becomes addicted to pornography it is, in and of itself, not the end for either the image bearer or the brain.

The Created Brain

Author Bradley Sicker, whose book *God on the Brain: What Cognitive Science Does (and Does Not) Tell Us about Faith, Human Nature, and the Divine* inspired this section, makes a dual argument about how we, as image bearers, are created with souls to know God and live in a morally pleasing manner. Secular science would state humanity is just a combination of various chemicals, energy, and probability. God has stated otherwise (Ps 139). The idea that we have souls does not warrant much expansion for the sake of this project.⁴⁷ However, it does cement the idea that humanity, along with its actions (both collective and individual) matter to something (i.e., in this case, God) far more significant than the physical realm.

We are Meant to Know God. Sickler states,

We do not discover God in the same way we discovered electrons or the strength of the gravitational constant. In fact, it may be that arguments give us entirely the wrong impression—they may entice us into thinking we can discover whether God exists just by thinking carefully.⁴⁸

We do, by the words of Paul (Rom 1), inherently know that God exists. We were created in His image, therefore we know who He is and that He, God, exists. Isaiah

⁴⁷ By making such a statement, I mean that the core narrative of reconciliation that exists in Scripture has to do with the fact that humanity is not just flesh and bone. For the sake of this project, however, I cannot spend too much time connecting the soul to the brain, then to the body, and then to the balance of life. I can nevertheless say that because humanity has a soul, everything, whether by thought or by deed, matters both to that individual soul, and to God.

⁴⁸ Brad Sickler, *God on the Brain: What Cognitive Science Does (and Does Not) Tell Us about Faith, Human Nature, and the Divine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2020), 20.

43:21 makes this point by saying “the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.” The image bearer was formed by God for God. This does not mean that humanity exists as automatons who cannot seek other gods. All of Scripture points to continual moments in which humanity fails to live up to its created purposes. We are created to be in relationship with God, yet humanity must make its own choice for where its allegiances lie (Josh 24:14-15). It is this that brings forth the second Christian perspective on the brain.

We Are Meant to Be Moral. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov 9:10). Morality is more than simply weighing the scales of justice more on the side of good than the side of evil. Much of Paul’s New Testament letter to the Romans tells humanity that it does no good and that all are very short of God’s standard. In the second book of the Old Testament, Exodus, the people of God are given commandments to which they cannot adhere by themselves. Humanity’s morality is not self-produced, but spiritually manifested in faith and obedience. By coming to know Christ, through salvation, humanity is justified by faith alone, through grace alone. A process of sanctification begins where, by God’s grace, the individual becomes more and more like Christ each day (Rom 8:29,12:1-2;1 Cor 11:1; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 2:20; Eph 2:10; 1 John 2:6). In fact, it is precisely because of this biblical mandate of morality that the brain must be redeemed, and can be redeemed. Pastor-theologian John Piper states that “the body is given to us to make visible the beauty of Christ.”⁴⁹ It is God’s design for humanity that the brain functions in the manner in which it was created so as to bring the most glory to God. It is, however, chiefly a problem when the brain becomes, for lack of better words, broken—and thus unable to glorify God. Once the brain is compromised, the body will soon follow.

⁴⁹ John Piper, “Present Your Bodies as a Living Sacrifice to God,” *Desiring God*, June 13, 2004, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/present-your-bodies-as-a-living-sacrifice-to-god>.

CHAPTER 3

PORNOGRAPY'S IMPACT ON THE BODY

Sanctified Sexuality to Splintered Sexuality

“Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.” – 1 Corinthians 6:18

A secular worldview markets sex as something that is purely physical, separated from both the emotions and the spirit. This marketing also includes a proclivity of obtaining as much sex as possible. The act of sexual intercourse is a physical one, yes. But it moves beyond the physical into the realm of intimacy, which is not as easily tangible. Throughout Scripture, we see that men and women are commanded to depart from their homes to form new families. Inside biblical marriage, the act of sexual intercourse is sanctified (i.e., created by God to glorify God). Any sexual act that occurs outside the confines of a biblical marriage is sinful.¹ In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul elaborates on how sexual sins serve a twofold evil. Firstly, the individual is sinning against God which is punishable by an eternal death in Hell. Secondly, on top of sinning against God the sexually immoral turns around and sins upon himself, dishonoring and destroying himself. Pornography erodes the body's inherent understanding of sexuality, and in its place inserts a splintered form of what was sanctified.

¹ Pornography use is sadly not bound to men and women who are single. It does, of course, exist wildly within heterosexual marriages. This, too, is sin. The point I am making above is that the area in which sexual behavior can be both justified and sanctified is within the confines of an emotionally healthy, physically and spiritually consenting, God-honoring, biblical marriage. Qualifying normal sexual behavior is found within the biblical principle of sexuality alone.

From Calm to Extreme

This particular section will deal with the effects of pornography on the male body alone. Scripture states and commands a biblical morality for a sanctified and holy sexuality, one that—while meant to bring about pleasure and intimacy to humanity—is ultimately meant for the glory of God. Pornography mimics the intimacy and pleasure provided by holy sexuality and thus creates a splintered sexuality. It also moves the human sexuality from outside (seeking to please a sanctified partner and God), and moves it within, only seeking to honor and please itself. This splintered sexuality can deeply impede normal sexual behavior.²

The Cinematic Sleight of Hand in Pornography. When one travels to his/her local cinema, they are engaging with the willful suspension of disbelief.³ To enjoy *The Lord of the Rings* one must momentarily suspend belief so as to identify with, and enjoy, the life of the hobbit. Cinematic displays have long saturated our minds with wonder and glory. In fact, a great story can often turn our very inner mind's eye towards the Maker, offering Him praise for creative genius. Pornography has seized on this willful suspension and capitalized upon it for the sake of evil. The viewer knows that he/she is not engaging in real sexual intercourse with a real human being, yet they willingly suspend reality for the sake of fleeting arousal and pleasure.

Pornography replaces normal expectations within sexual intercourse with extreme expectations. Extreme expectations of body image. Extreme expectations of satisfaction. Extreme expectations of frequency. When these extreme expectations are not met, or not sustained with frequency, the enters extreme dissatisfaction. A study from the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* states the following:

² Normal sexual behavior is defined as what is both honoring to God and to fellow man. Anything that dishonors fellow man will ultimately dishonor God (Col 3:23).

³ The willing suspension of disbelief is “the willingness of a reader to ignore critical thinking in order to enjoy a story.”

Our research indicates that men who view high rates of pornography are more likely to rely on pornography to become and remain sexually excited and, when engaged in dyadic sexual behaviors, are more likely to integrate pornography in sexual activities. In addition, men with high rates of pornography use expressed diminished enjoyment in the enactment of sexually intimate behaviors compared to men with lower rates of pornography use.⁴

A holy sexuality offers that opportunity for a man and woman to willfully and lovingly engage in actions for which their bodies were created. Pornography uniquely usurps this creation claim by isolating the individual within an environment where real intimacy cannot be achieved, no matter how often pursued. A holy sexuality, and its factors of intimacy, are increased by the daily thralls of life alongside a spouse. Intimacy grows in the space between healthy sexual activity (e.g., living life with the same spouse for 25 years). Pornography, on the other hand, grows in angst in time spent away. The brain and body become acclimatized to seek the explicit and when it is not being sought, the brain and body surrenders in discomfort. Pornography, as the splintered sexuality, replaces intimacy with enmity. From the perspective of Christ's redeeming blood, no sexuality has to remain permanently splintered. Yet if one continues to habitually engage in pornography, over time the splintered sexuality will, in turn, produce a shattered self-image.

Shattered Self-Image

Much like the brain being separate from the mind, so too can sexuality and self-image exist on slightly different planes. Society has all but agreed upon the various implied pressures placed upon individuals, especially young people, by the wide reaching arm of social media.⁵ One of the most common plights of social media is the ability for people to compare themselves to one another. The popular social media website

⁴ Chyng Sun, et al, "Pornography and the Male Sexual Script: An Analysis of Consumption and Sexual Relations," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 45, no. 4 (2014): 983–94, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0391-2>.

⁵ Faith Allendorf and Cecilia Milmo, "Students Say Social Media Causes Negative Body Image, Eating Disorders," *The Daily Illini*, February 21, 2022, <https://dailyillini.com/featured/features-top-stories/2022/02/21/students-say-social-media-causes-negative-body-image-eating-disorders/>.

Instagram is renowned for its presentation of highly polished representations of everyday life. Even now, as people wholly admit that “social media is not always real,” people still struggle to separate how they look in actuality versus what is represented upon a glass screen.⁶ Pornography may capitalize on such a moral diorama by exerting contentious pressure upon the soul that ultimately breeds a duality of existence. Pornography shatters what is normal sexual behavior only to replace it with what is unrealistic and generally unattainable.⁷

Cogito, Ergo Sum

French philosopher Rene Descartes coined the famous statement “*Cogito, ergo sum.*”⁸ This radical idea flew in the face of doubting one’s rational existence by proving that precisely by thinking about one’s existence is the reality of said existence in one’s own mind. If Descartes was to think, Descartes was to exist. In the same line of thought, if one is to view pornography, one is to think that pornography, and its perspectives on sexuality, is indeed real sexuality. Sadly, this is an incredibly harmful thought that not only places immense trouble on the brain, but, in due course, begins to change the way the body views and experiences sexuality.

Pornography, when it wreaks havoc, sets in on the body and begins to change normal sexual desire to that which is extreme. So what does pornography do to body image? If all one sees is picture-perfect presentations of anatomy and sexual behavior, then what is one to do about their personal shortcomings or inability to live up to unreachable standards? The consumer in question would turn and then believe that what

⁶ Marika Tiggemann and Isabella Anderberg, “Social Media Is Not Real: The Effect of ‘Instagram vs Reality’ Images on Women’s Social Comparison and Body Image,” *New Media & Society* 22, no. 12 (2019): 2,183–99, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819888720>.

⁷ It should also be mentioned that much of pornography displays relationships that mirror no realistic version of health, respect, and consent. For this reason what pornography presents should remain unattainable, even as it is offered to the masses.

⁸ “I think, therefore I am.”

is seen through the illicit lens of pornography is, in fact, reality.

One particular study in the journal *Psychology of Men and Masculinities* took a speculative look at the detailed harms of pornography consumption. A healthy self-image might engage with the biblical principle of human limitedness, realizing that a sanctified sexual relationship with his/her spouse will contain the normal ups and downs that are present in all facets of life. By recognizing God as supreme Creator, the human realizes that he/she is not limitless, but bound by their role as sub-creator. Thus, it is fair to deduce that the brain, body, and life of humanity will have set limits. A healthy self-image is not positive self-talk or affirmations of how one is desirable. Healthy self-image is realizing that the brain, body, and life contain the brokenness of sin (1 John 5:16-17) and that, through Christ's redemption, sanctification can overcome even the darkest of plights with the hope that one day, when the created meets the Creator, all darkness is wiped away (Rev 21:4). Journal author Tracy Tylka states,

Extending beyond body image, the present study revealed that men's pornography use was positively associated with romantic attachment avoidance and anxiety. Theoretical assertions as well as preliminary findings from qualitative research suggest that pornography scripts present gender-typed and sexualized working models of self and others, which could shape how men position themselves within their actual romantic relationships. As a socialization agent, pornography use may be linked to men's (a) romantic attachment avoidance by legitimizing and encouraging sex without intimacy and (b) romantic attachment anxiety by heightening anxiety surrounding partner commitment. That is, by showing fleeting sexual encounters and noncommittal relationships, pornography may validate men's fears that their real-life partners will cheat on, reject, and/or abandon them.⁹

After the effects of pornography consumption set in, and sexuality is splintered, the body is no longer to remember what is normal and moral within the realms of holy sexuality. The brain becomes warped, the conscious seared (1 Tim 4), and the body follows suit by changing the way it responds to arousal entirely. Once the brain and the body are set on the same path, the most troubling aspect of all transpires. Addiction is

⁹ Tracy L. Tylka, "No Harm in Looking, Right? Men's Pornography Consumption, Body Image, and Well-Being." *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 16, no. 1 (2015): 97–107, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035774>.

what happens after both the brain and the body have been riddled by the long effects of pornography consumption. Addiction further injures the brain and the body, but then takes hostage the entire balance of one's life. It is at this stage where the very life of the individual is threatened.

God on the Body

“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” – 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20

Genesis is the origin story of all things. From the vastness of the universe to the individual hairs on a human head (Luke 12:7), God is and always will be the ultimate authority on all things. He is both the Creator and the Adjudicator, but He is also, graciously, the redeemer. The effects of pornography are far reaching like the roots of an aged tree, ever connected and hard to cut loose from the ground. Yet nowhere in Scripture is the reader taught that if he/she pursues God with all of their hearts (Mark 12:30) that God will cease to be found. Eden painted the idyllic picture of how our bodies would function both in the physical and spiritual realms. We work and honor God with our physical abilities. We *know* (Gen 4:1) our spouses and honor God with our physical design. Gracefully, we rest as God has decreed and honor Him by doing nothing with our physical bodies. All of these actions are spiritual as well because they suggest, in their obedience, a significant level of submission to the one who created. After the Fall (Gen 3), sin entered into the world and broke everything, including our bodies.

Sin has shattered the human body, both physically (i.e., sickness, limitations, etc.) and in spirit (i.e., separation from God). Pornography is sin. As Paul writes in his New Testament letters, it is a sin against God and against the consumer himself (1 Cor 5:1-3, 6:21-20). Pornography breaks down the brain and then breaks down the body as the brain serves as the body's main handler. Is this brokenness permanent? Is it permanent only physically and not spiritually? Can God step down and redeem the

human body from the wreckage of pornography?¹⁰

The Broken Body of Christ for the Broken Body of Man

Sam Allberry is a pastor, apologist, writer, and speaker.¹¹ Author of a number of books, Allberry possesses the wonderful talent, coupled with honed skill, to speak to cultural topics of post-modernity with tact and control. In his book *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies: How the Gospel Is Good News for Our Physical Selves*, Allberry speaks on how to biblically assess our physical bodies in the opening chapter when he notes that our bodies are handmade, fearfully made, individually made, purposefully made, and personally made. Each distinction is flushed out further in his book but Allberry communicated that our bodily biblical assessment should first be to thank God for this physical gift of the body. Allberry says, “we are creatures made by a good and gracious Creator. If even fallen and imperfect bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made, then we can and should thank our maker for them.”¹² Before we recognize brokenness we must first recognize the Creator. However, the severity of brokenness present within humanity must be discussed.

The Broken Body of Man. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” – 1 Corinthians 15:17

The Apostle Paul is ultimately speaking here on the power of the resurrection of Christ Jesus and how it is the focal point of our redemption. The fact that Christ defeated death will mean that, one day, those who have put their trust in Him, will too

¹⁰ Chapter 5 will speak at length on the process of rehabilitation and restoration for the whole human (brain, body, and balance of life). This section will deal with the redemption of the human body alone.

¹¹ Sam Allberry, *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies: How the Gospel Is Good News for Our Physical Selves* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2021).

¹² Allberry, *What God Has to Say About Our Bodies*, 29.

defeat death. Yet the latter portion of verse seventeen states “and you are still in your sins.” Our unforgiven and unrepentant sins separate our bodies and spirits from a Holy God. Our bodies aren’t just broken down in the form of our physical, or even mental, health; they are, essentially, in a sinful state of non-repair.

The spiritual condition, one of condemnation, forces the body on a path where by “the temptation of Satan, man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and environment inclined toward sin.”¹³ Humanity is meant for greatness, but due to its sin is unable to achieve its created intention. Allberry writes:

This is what we were designed for: loving God with all that we are, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. So this is, therefore, what our body is intended for. It is meant to be a means by which we live in this love of God and others. The two go together, of course. Failing to love others is by definition a failure to love the God who made them.¹⁴ They might be our neighbors, but they are his handiwork. And a failure to love God always leads to a lack of neighbor love, for God is the one who shows us what true love looks like. Apart from him, we can never fully know what love truly is and means.¹⁵

Pornography enacts upon the human a grave incapacity towards love. People, who are created in God’s image, become products to be consumed and not humans to be cherished. These products are no longer viewed as bodies that represent that glorious handiwork of God almighty. Their physical bodies are kidnapped even from their spirit, strictly existing in the realm of what is bodily and visceral, for viewership and consumption alone. The human body who consumes unknowingly ends up creating the same circumstance for themselves. Their bodies, too, are removed from the image of God

¹³ “Baptist Faith & Message 2000, Article III, Man,” The Baptist Faith and Message, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#iii>.

¹⁴ I would submit that pornography is one of the most significant ways in which we, as humanity, fail to love others and love the God who created those who are on the screens and in the studios of these sexually explicit enterprises.

¹⁵ Allberry, *What God Has to Say About Our Bodies*, 112.

and replaced with a lens which views the entire cosmos through sexuality.¹⁶ Allberry, again, explain this:

We've physically lashed out when we should have walked away. We've written and said words designed to crush someone else and exalt ourselves. Our physicality has become so deeply entwined with our sinfulness. And at times it catches up with us and we feel deep shame.¹⁷

There is hope, however, for the broken body. There was another body that was, in exchange of being broken by its own choices, chosen to be broken for the sake of others. What Christ accomplished on the cross was not merely just defeat the bondages of pornography, although it does, but defeat all darkness for once and for all.

The Broken Body of Christ in Substitute. “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, take, eat; this is my body.” – Matthew 26:26

In the context of this passage, the breaking that occurs is centered around the sharing of bread at the final supper between Jesus and His closest followers, His disciples. We partake in this Lord's Supper to remember that His body was willfully sacrificed in place of ours at His crucifixion. This divine event had multiple implications for both the physical and the spiritual body.

The spiritual body, also wrecked by pornography use, is redeemed by the work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. No longer are our spiritual bodies bound to an eternal separation from God in Hell (Luke 23:43). A spiritual process, that begins with salvation, contains justification, sanctification, and, eventually, glorification all circles around the

¹⁶ I do not believe anyone can remove the distinctions that God created humanity from their own lives. This statement is to highlight how humans, through pornography consumption, self-isolate themselves from their truest identity (i.e., as image bearers).

¹⁷ Allberry, *What God Has to Say About Our Bodies*, 103. Again, I find what Allberry is saying to be astounding. While in this section he is not explicitly speaking on pornography, he ends up giving incredible definitions for the consequences that pornography consumption causes for both parties. The consumer is engaging in actions that in the end will crush the produced and exalt the consumer. It is haunting to consider the effects that pornography has upon those who are trapped within a system of evil.

person of Christ (Rom 3:28, 5:1, 6:19, 8:1, 8:16-17; 1 Cor 4:17; Gal 2:16; Phil 1:6, 2:12–13, 3:21; 1 Thess 4:3; Rev 1:6). Christ’s work on the Cross redeems our spiritual bodies from the effects of spiritual death.

As faithful repentance occurs so does justification, which is in its simplest terms a legal designation. It’s not as if the sinner is no longer guilty before the judge but it is as if he no longer stands on trial, but walks freely because of Christ being on trial in his place. In his letter to the Romans, Paul stated we, “are justified by grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom 3:24-25). We are justified, and walk freely when we repent and place our faith in Christ, because Christ is now the one upon whom the judgement has been carried out. The sinner is given Christ in his place and the wrath of God is eternally satisfied.

Once justified, sanctification begins its lifelong course of direction and conviction under the power of the Holy Spirit. While we are not blameless, the power of the Holy Spirit can, “sanctify. . .completely” (1 Thess 5:23). While the apostle Paul speaks on this topic at length, it is clear that while justification was an instant act of validation, sanctification is the lifelong pursuit, under the power of the Holy Spirit, to become more like Christ, our victorious vindicator. One day, either at the end of days or at the end of individual life, the believer will reach a point where sanctification is made complete in the process of glorification. Paul states, “when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col 3:4). In this moment the spiritual and physical will unite in harmony, as God always intended, without the presence of sin, in Heaven to forever worship Him. The spiritual body (i.e., the soul) is forever transformed.

The spiritual body undergoes a redemption that is blood-bought and unearned. It is made new, and this is precisely where Christianity uses the term “born again” (see the story of Nicodemus in John 3). We are not physically reborn, but spiritually reborn.

The physical body is important to the process of spiritual birth (i.e., one cannot become a born again Christian if he/she is not physically living), but the level of physicality present in a human is not contingent upon their ability to become saved (i.e., a paraplegic is no less/more deserving of spiritual rebirth than one who possesses all limbs). But what about the physical body and its ability to experience new life? What level of redemption occurs within the physical realm? Are the effects of sin wiped away, as in justification, or will there remain scars from the grievous injuries caused by sin, especially that of pornography?

The Body Remembers. In 2015, Boston-based psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk authored what is perhaps his magnum opus on the causes and consequences of trauma: *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. In this volume, van der Kolk primarily uses people that are unfortunate victims of war and sexual abuse.¹⁸ Uniquely, however, van der Kolk's research shows that the horror present within the core of trauma will fundamentally change both the brain and body.¹⁹ The body, in the wake of pornography consumption, will remember the trauma of confusion caused by experiencing sexuality through means that aren't real, but rather wholly artificial. The body will remember the increased level of stimulus provided by pornography that is not reinforced by normal human interaction. The body will go so far as to prevent sexual arousal and satisfaction unless pornography is simultaneously present within the human sexual activity.²⁰ What happens to our bodies, either by external inflicted or internally

¹⁸ While I am not qualified to make such classifications, such trauma that occurs at the level of sexual abuse and assault, as well as in violent conflict within war, will be classified within this project as extreme. This is not to mean that it is extreme in occurrence, but rather to communicate the unlikelihood of experiencing said trauma. While I believe consuming pornography is ultimately self-traumatizing, with the effects being very serious, it is ultimately a choice, for the majority of cases, as a consumer, to engage with it willfully. Sexual abuse, assault, and wartime violence, on the other hand, are inflicted upon the person involuntarily and without prior warning, thus creating an even deeper sense of wrongdoing and violation.

¹⁹ Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2015).

²⁰ Chyng Sun et al., "Pornography and the Male Sexual Script: An Analysis of Consumption

inflicted means, will become a permanent part of our person. Much like a broken bone on the curative path, our bodies have remarkable healing capacities that reach into the intangible. Yet the consumption of pornography, while it can be eliminated from the consumer's life in a wholly successful manner, will leave signs that a greater problem once existed.²¹

The Body Redeemed. While the spiritual body is wholly redeemed and reborn, the physical body is no less redeemed in the sense of what Christ can accomplish in the life of a repentant believer. While the physical body will remember well the effects of our sin, as well as there may be consequences from previous sins, the life of the believer must remain focused on the eventual destination of glorification in Christ in Heaven. As Allberry wisely states,

We often labor under the misunderstanding that the life to come will be some vague form of nonphysical existence. If we have any image of it, it is of something almost ghostly, floating around as sprits. But the vision the Bible has for us is not wraithlike but physical. And the evidence and template for this physical life to come is the resurrection of Jesus. The Bible is clear about what happened to the body of Jesus following his death. Jesus physically died. He was physically buried. And he physically arose again. He went on to experience new bodily life after his death.²²

For the human body, both physically and spiritually, the earthly moment of salvation promises the later and heavenly resurrection of our physical bodies. At that time and on that day, the human body will, for the follower of Christ, no longer contain evidence and trauma of any nature, much less that of pornography. For the consumer of pornography, this must be the focus and driving point of a holistic recovery from the bondage of sexual immorality. One day, all matters will be made right and will be returned to the divine design as God always planned. Paul states, when discussing the

and Sexual Relations,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 45, no. 4 (March 2014): pp. 983-994, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0391-2>.

²¹ Ada McVean, “Broken Bones Grow Back Stronger Sort Of,” Office for Science and Society, April 19, 2019, <https://www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/did-you-know/broken-bones-grow-back-stronger-sort>.

²² Allberry, *What God Has to Say About Our Bodies*, 177–8.

glorification to come as perfected by Christ, “who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power than enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil 3:21). Those who follow after Christ must bear the marks of sin and shame, although not its consequence, until they are perfected in Heaven, like Christ who knew no sin and certainly knew not of pornography.

Once the brain and the body give way to the grips of pornography, the balance of life wavers under its divorcing weight. This balance is not just disrupted on the individual level, but ultimately also at the corporate level of the church where ministries, families, and even the name of Christ can become damaged. It is vital to understand that pornography, with its goals of darkness, intends to reach into every area of the life of the consumer until the consumer himself can no longer identify who he is or what he has become.

CHAPTER 4

PORNOGRAPHY'S IMPACT ON THE BALANCE OF LIFE

From Consumption to Addiction

Pornography *consumption* is the willful intent to engage within pornographic material on any available medium.¹ Even in a culture that is highly sexualized, explicit pornography is still held behind barriers (albeit fragile ones) that prevent it from being exposed to the general public during daily life. For pornography to be consumed, therefore, the consumer must actively seek out and interact with the material. On the other hand, addiction exists on an entirely different tier of complexity where the consumer is bound by something beyond simple interaction with a said medium. Addiction is seeking pornography whether you ultimately wish to or not. According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, “Addiction is a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual’s life experiences.”² The available information on the rate and seriousness of addiction among those who consume pornography is growing rapidly. While this project does not aim to determine why or how individuals become addicted to pornography, it is within its scope to discuss how addiction wreaks havoc on the balance of the individual’s life.³

¹ Accidental exposure to pornography, especially among adolescents, is a legitimate issue that this paper will not seek to cover in detail.

² “What Is the Definition of Addiction?,” American Society of Addiction Medicine, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.asam.org/quality-care/definition-of-addiction>.

³ For the sake of this project, I am viewing the balance of life as what some may refer to as

While a single instance of exposure to pornography is troubling, chronic addiction is a genuine threat to the person.⁴ A healthy balance of daily life is readily interrupted by the time spent seeking to consume pornography. Secular science has difficulty determining the reality of pornography addiction, but continued consumption seems to fit with individuals who are behaviorally addicted.⁵ The *Journal of Clinical Medicine* states that “behaviorally addicted individuals frequently exhibit a problematic consumption model: impaired control (e.g., craving, unsuccessful attempts to reduce the behavior), impairment (e.g., narrowing of interests, neglect of other areas of life), and risky use (persisting with intake despite awareness of damaging psychological effects).⁶ People addicted to pornography can spend at least 10+ hours per week consuming pornography.⁷ Like other diseases and health disorders, some comorbidities can exasperate the person’s predisposition to pornography consumption.⁸ The same study estimates that roughly 3 to 6 percent of a population emulates specific types of sexual behaviors that are problematic. It continues, “hypersexual behavior has been associated with anxiety disorder, followed by mood disorder, substance use disorder, and sexual

normal rhythms of life. Simply put, someone who engages in the normal rhythms of life is able to accomplish what is set before them (i.e., school, work, family, personal matters) in a way that is not overtly derailed by either internal (i.e., overwhelming depression, anxiety, etc.) or external (i.e., various addictions, poor lifestyle choices, etc.) factors. Pornography disrupts the rhythms of life because the individual is no longer able to interact normally with his/her day-to-day life due to the combination of internal and external pressures to consume pornography.

⁴ American Psychological Association, “Age of First Exposure to Pornography Shapes Men’s Attitudes toward Women,” August 3, 2017, <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/08/pornography-exposure>.

⁵ Todd Love, Christian Laier, Matthias Brand, Linda Hatch, and Raju Hajela, “Neuroscience of Internet Pornography Addiction: A Review and Update,” MDPI. Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, September 18, 2015, <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-328X/5/3/388>.

⁶ Rubén de Alarcón, Javier de la Iglesia, Nerea Casado, and Angel Montejo, “Online Porn Addiction: What We Know and What We Don’t—a Systematic Review,” *Journal of Clinical Medicine* 8, no. 1 (2019): 91, <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm8010091>.

⁷ “Pornography Facts and Statistics: Effects of Porn Addiction on Relationships,” The Recovery Village Drug and Alcohol Rehab, September 13, 2022, <https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/process-addiction/porn-addiction/pornography-statistics/>.

⁸ “Common Comorbidities with Substance Use Disorders Research Report,” (Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse), April 2020.

dysfunction.”⁹ Interestingly, these same disorders are present among substance abuse issues (ranging from alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine) and the problem of consistently playing video games. This clinical manifestation should help establish a legitimate warning sign for increased pornography consumption. In a sexualized culture, many are hesitant to deem pornography as an actual drug that can be abused, and/or harm people who are not willfully involved in its consumption. In other words, if it is out of sight it is therefore out of the daily mind of non-users. Furthermore, perhaps due to the modern-day wordsmithing that mirrors sleight of hand (i.e., the preference of the term “sex worker” over “prostitute”), many do not see the similarity between someone being paid for sexual activity and someone being paid to perform sexual activity that is then rebroadcasted to a vast audience.¹⁰ Even if the data is inconclusive about the rate at which pornography becomes an addiction, the fact remains that billions are consuming pornography with an unbridled sense of an increased need for perpetual pleasure.

Like any other addiction, however, continued consumption of pornography is treatable.¹¹ Many devotional books on this matter are available within a simple Google search. Unlike alcoholism and addiction to illicit drugs, pornography consumption may not require rehabilitative treatment that removes the consumer from his/her environment (although it should not be excluded from possible treatment plans). In a detrimental sense, unlike alcoholism, pornography may not readily make itself known in the exterior life of the addicted (e.g., the user may maintain a functional life).¹²

⁹ Rubén de Alarcón et al., “Online Porn Addiction: What We Know and What We Don’t—a Systematic Review,” *Journal of Clinical Medicine* 8, no. 1 (2019): p. 91, <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm8010091>.

¹⁰ Anders Kaye, “Why Pornography is Not Prostitution: Folk Theories of Sexuality in the Law of Vice,” *Saint Louis University Law Journal* 60, no. 2 (Winter 2016).

¹¹ Kimberly S. Young, “Treatment Outcomes Using CBT-IA with Internet-Addicted Patients,” *Journal of Behavioral Addictions* 2, no. 4 (2013): 209–15, <https://doi.org/10.1556/jba.2.2013.4.3>.

¹² The rampant statistics at which people consume pornography would suggest that people who are regular users likely maintain functional lifestyles. This sobering idea should further make the case of how serious pornography addiction can become for people.

Many will be able to find freedom from a pornography addiction through establishing parameters that pay proper respect to an addictive lifestyle.¹³

If addiction remains, the balance of life is likely to be further disrupted into ever-increasing stages of desperation. Pornography seems to create a cruel cycle in the addicted individual. This cycle, as reviewed in the next section, can trap the consumer into further depths of addiction by perpetrating a series of lies that further disrupts the normal rhythms of life.

From Addiction to Detestation

Initial pornography consumption can occur for various reasons, some intentional and some accidental. Consumption can be sought out to address feelings of emotional pain. In the early stages of addiction, or what one might call a pre-addictive stage, where the brain and body are rapidly adjusting to the super-normal stimulus present within porn, the desire to cover emotional pain can feel temporarily satiated. This is the arena in which pornography tricks the user into thinking his problems have been solved (i.e., I no longer feel down after I view pornography), yet the heart remains deceitful above all things and is not to be trusted (Jer 17:9). A deeply problematic cycle emerges when addiction takes hold, and it is called the shame cycle.¹⁴ The shame cycle includes five separate but sequentially damaging stages. The first stage is the trigger stage. Much like its name suggests, a trigger is a lever by which, when initiated, sets off a chain reaction within the brain, body, and balance of life (remember neural pathways create conduits that are quickly traveled as to not overwork the brain). One of the key steps in recovery from pornography addiction is successfully identifying triggers and cues that *push* the user towards engaging with pornographic material.

¹³ Such treatment plans and programs will not be discussed within this project.

¹⁴ “Understanding the Shame Cycle.” Covenant Eyes, February 27, 2022, <https://www.covenanteyes.com/2022/03/28/understanding-the-shame-cycle/>.

The shame cycle helps users to see the disruption that occurs in the balance of life. The personal woundedness presents itself in a myriad of ways in the life of the user. Understanding the woundedness present is not always contingent about identifying and avoiding triggering behaviors. The constant consumption of pornography creates a ritual of use that removes us from normal daily rhythms. Whereas an unaddicted human might come home after work to sit down and enjoy television, the addicted user of pornography may unintentionally slide right into a ritual that predisposes them to pornography consumption (e.g., accessing streaming platforms that are unguarded towards explicit material). As mentioned above in the section on the brain, the brain will rewire itself to desire new states, and the automated section of the brain is going to begin associating certain behaviors with pathways to pornography (i.e., being alone with a smart device).

Pornography occurs in the third step of the shame cycle. It is necessary to note, especially from the Christian perspective, that even if one experiences the first two steps, the third is not an automatic choice (1 Cor 10:13). A way out is possible for even the most heavily addicted user. And yet, perhaps the most powerful step within the shame cycle is shame itself. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines shame as “a feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior.”¹⁵ Studies are inconclusive on the correlation between shame and pornography use, meaning it is not yet entirely obvious if increased shame drives an increased usage of pornography.¹⁶ The online community NoFap, which focuses on sobriety from pornography, points out the following effects of pornography on their members’ livelihoods: low self-esteem/self-confidence, greater sense of shame, unstable moods, and general lack of motivation.¹⁷

¹⁵ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, “S”, in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Logos Bible Software 9.

¹⁶ Manpreet Dhuffar and Mark Griffiths, “Understanding the Role of Shame and Its Consequences in Female Hypersexual Behaviours: A Pilot Study,” *Journal of Behavioral Addictions* 3, no. 4 (2014): 231–37, <https://doi.org/10.1556/jba.3.2014.4.4>.

¹⁷ “Porn Addiction - What Is It?” NoFap, February 27, 2022, <https://nofap.com/porn->

These devastating effects can create an internal thought environment where the user begins to detest themselves. Personal identity is squandered away, and is replaced with an almost complete lack of self-esteem. A 2017 study in *Computers in Human Behavior* found that certain patterns of pornography use were related to users' levels of self-esteem.¹⁸ The higher the level of addiction (i.e., in this instance, usage pattern), the lower the overall self-esteem for the user. Regardless of what feeds the factor of detestation, the net result is indeed the same. The user is now trapped within a disadvantageous loop that has disrupted his life entirely. At this point in the cycle of shame, it is unlikely that the individual will stop using pornography. The emotional pain is continually increasing, fueled by chronic levels of shame. As is key in most behavioral addictions, the original source of pain has been misplaced by the feelings of shame, inadequacy for being able to implement change, and a general malaise towards life in general. The user may not remember, at this stage, what led them to pornography use in the first place. The last step of the shame cycle has the opportunity to be the most damaging. The final step, hiding, removes the addicted user from avenues of help, recovery, and restoration. Pornography use has become so prevalent in the life of the user that hiding, from friends, family, and community seems to be the only logical step forward. At this point, the user will likely feel that no one would ever understand how they ended up in such a place of disgust. It is in this stage, if not treated, that a lifelong addiction could fester, thus potentially causing the entire demise of the individual.¹⁹

[addiction/](#).

¹⁸ Cameron C. Brown, Jared A. Durtschi, Jason S. Carroll, and Brian J. Willoughby, "Understanding and Predicting Classes of College Students Who Use Pornography," *Computers in Human Behavior* 66 (2017): 114–21, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.09.008>.

¹⁹ Studies and statistics show that heavily addicted users of pornography become desensitized to "normal" displays of erotic behaviors. Therefore, these individuals then begin to interact and engage with violent and often criminal representations of pornography. This is what I mean by the demise of the individual. Perhaps most recently, Jared Fogle (the former spokesperson for Subway) was sentenced to fifteen years in federal prison due to his interaction with criminal pornography.

From Detestation to Isolation

“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” – Genesis 3:8

From the opening pages of Scripture we see the natural, broken response to dealing with our sin and shame. We hide from God (Gen 3:9). Most churches are not addressing pornography adequately. This is where pornography consumption devastates the local church. At no point in Scripture does one find the call for believers to isolate and hide, especially when steeped in habitual, damaging sins. Proverbs 28:13 states conversely in fact, “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” While it may not need to be heard from the pulpit every Sunday, our intentional times of gathering need to address the cycle of shame. Congregational care is not a call to display the darkest sins of our members to the masses, but it is an environment that needs to exist, especially for those addicted to pornography, as a safe place where repentance and redemption can occur among trusted parties, and before the throne of God. In fact, our churches need to even serve our leaders as they too struggle with pornography addiction.²⁰

We would be foolish to assume that the isolation that occurs among our addicted members has no impact upon the future of the church. According to the Institute for Family Studies, “porn may seriously be getting in the way of young people preparing for and forming their most fulfilling and intimate relationships that are critical to their well-being.”²¹ If people become trapped in the grips of pornography at a young age, they

²⁰ Jeremy Wiles, “15 Mind-Blowing Statistics about Pornography and the Church,” Conqueror Series (KingdomWorks Studios, May 5 2022). <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/15-mind-blwing-statistics-about-pornography-and-the-church..>

²¹ Mark H. Butler, “Is Pornography Use Increasing Loneliness, Particularly for Young People?” Institute for Family Studies, July 3, 2018, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/is-pornography-use-increasing-loneliness-particularly-for-young-people..>

may not return to church, must less foster a family that is committed to a healthy local church. If the brain, the body, and the balance of life have been impacted by pornography, wherein lies the hope of a future without pornography? Can the brain, body, and the whole life be healed and restored? It is from this perspective, the Christian faith, that pornography is not just a dogged addiction without any room for hopefulness. The Christian perspective on the impact of pornography consumption is both restorative and redemptive.

CHAPTER 5
FROM ISOLATION TO RESTORATION

**Not Merely a Brain,
Not Merely a Body, and More than One Life**

“and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” – 1 Corinthians 3:23

The summation of this research has divided the created human into three parts. The brain was created to serve as the processor behind our very lives and all of their choices. The body, faithful to the brain, is meant to serve out the choices and decisions ,on a day to day basis, that the brain implements. The balance of life is what comes to pass when the brain and body are working in harmony as they should (3 John 1:2). Nothing God ever created was initially made to cause harm and or disruption (Gen 1:31). This tripartite focus, that is the full make up of humanity, in body, brain, and in life, is still short of the full picture. For if we were only to be the sum of our parts we would strictly be an impressive walking, talking supercomputer. Humanity is much more than its parts. Humanity is an image bearer to the Almighty God (see Gen 5:1).

More than Parts, But Parts to a Whole

For the Christian to remove himself from the greater picture of his belonging to the Creator is a serious error. Those outside the will of Christ often assume wrongly that sexuality and spirituality are not connected. The late musical artist Prince was quoted saying, “the love of God and the sexual urges we feel are one and the same somehow. For him (Prince) it all comes from the same root inside a human being. God planted these urges and it’s never wrong to feel that way. The urge itself is a holy urge.” While I vehemently argue that Prince was theologically misinformed, the late artist was touching

out something that is true. Our sexuality and spirituality were never meant to have been separated. Our sexuality, much like all aspects of our life (Col 3:23), is meant to bring honor and glory to God. We can glorify God with a sexual relationship found within a God-honoring marriage. Our bodies can be holy vessels for His fame.

One of the first steps a Christian seeking recovery from pornography must take is to seek the wholeness of God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus makes reference to the trinity (John 10:30). The trinity is God in three persons, but still one God. There are not three separate Gods, but one. The Christian recovering from pornography, or any sexual immorality, will undoubtedly face a fractured soul. Years of abuse will cause damage that is both seriously rooted and physically felt. This damage can be reversed through counseling, therapy, and most importantly by the redemptive grace and love of Christ Jesus.²²

Christians must focus upon the end goal, the glorification to come when seeing Jesus face to face (1 Pet 5:4). If Christians adhere to secular science alone they will miss the big picture of their created beings, their bought bodies. They will see that they have three different problems in three different areas of their lives. The brain is damaged. The body is damaged. Ultimately, the balance of life is damaged. While the Christian does not ignore these realities, he must realize, and hold fast to, the wholeness behind his created being. He was made to serve God with all *his* heart and with all *his* soul and with all *his* mind and all *his* strength (Mark 12:30). Jesus touches on all aspects of the brain, the body, and the balance of life and yet does not separate them into individual categories. One must not seek recovery in just the brain. One must not seek to honor God with just the body. We are parts of a whole. A whole being created to worship and submit to a Holy God, who finds wholeness in His relationship with Himself (i.e., the Trinity).

²² Kimberly S. Young, "Treatment Outcomes Using CBT-IA with Internet-Addicted Patients," *Journal of Behavioral Addictions* 2, no. 4 (2013): pp. 209-215, <https://doi.org/10.1556/jba.2.2013.4.3>.

Rejoining the Whole

Isolation does not have to be permanent. The Psalmist cries out, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit” (Ps 51:12). Later in his poetry, the Psalmist cries, “Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. You will increase my honor and comfort me once more” (Ps 71:20-21). At no point in Scripture is the faithfully repentant soul turned away from restoration and reconciliation. Christ invites all to come, who are heavy laden, to exchange their troubles for his own (Matt 11:29-30). But what exactly does that look like for someone who has been trapped in the thralls of pornography addiction? Thankfully, for us all, Christ does not make the way to Him hard to understand.

Repent. Quite simply put, all must repent and call on the name of the Lord. Call upon the name of the Lord for salvation (Rom 10:13). Repentance for salvation is a one-time occurrence. Yet, the repentance of daily sins in the battle for sexual purity is ongoing. This turning away from sins must continue with effort, grace, and prayer. The Christian, even the Christian who does not struggle with pornography, will never arrive at a state of perfection on this side of Heaven. Repentance must be a daily aspect of the life seeking to become more like Christ.

Rejoin. The local church is the field hospital where Christians receive the nurture they need to remain in the battle “against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). I do not think one can battle pornography addiction alone must less without the help and aid of the local church. While it may not be necessary for the addicted to speak before the entire church, there should be a place where those seeking reconciliation and restoration can exist and receive the soul care they desperately need so that the brain, body, and balance

of life, once again, return to a sense of wholeness. Whether in group or under the guise of a pastor, deacon, or trusted congregant, the one seeking recovery should be open to those who are further along in their walks with Christ.

Reenlist. The battle against pornography will take from the user until there seems to be nothing left to give. What the person seeking recovery cannot afford to do is fail to fight. For some, they have long been out of the battle altogether. Generally, God may have turned themselves over to their immoral desires (Rom 1:24). Battling for purity must be constant and remain non-negotiable. Scripture tells us, “be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Perhaps, those addicted have felt all but devoured, yet they must fight. They must reenlist in the battle for purity, for the sake of their own lives, for the sake of the gospel, and for the sake of the local church. All must fight to be pure so that we might see God (Matt 5:8).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Pornography is detrimental to the human experience in the following three ways. The brain receives and reacts to sexually explicit material in a fashion that is similar to substance abuse misuse. Sadly, the brain is not equipped, or designed, to differentiate between good and bad stimuli, and thus, accepts as much pornography as the user will feed. This constant feeding cycle rewires and remaps the brain to desire sexual immorality, even if there is a disadvantageous cost to the body and the life. God created the body and the human soul as one harmonious entity with the purpose of glorifying Him. Once the brain is rewired, the body follows closely behind seeking to find pleasure that the brain will find rewarding, regardless of the source or the frequency of use. The balance of life is disrupted by pornography use. No stone is left unturned by the damaging effects of pornography addiction. Addiction sets in by forcing the human to cope with a serious sickness that is only medicated by the further ingesting of bitter ingredients that caused the original condition in the first place.

In the previous pages, the arguments that have been made are of great concern for three reasons. First, sexuality and spirituality must not remain separated, even if secular culture aims to further separate the two. The local church must address the deep and devious problems caused by pornography and its divisive nature. Spiritually mature sexuality is just as much a part of Christian discipleship as the stewardship of finances. All of life for Christ alone. If left unattended, both can and will cause great ruin to the individual and to the local church, and to the greater witness of Christianity. The teachings of the church must unify, around God's Word, to approach sexuality with meek attitudes so that individuals may be freed from the grip of pornography. Second, secular

culture will continue to sexualize and demonize things that are Holy. Perverse attitudes from 100 years ago seem almost comical compared to today's dark issues.¹ Who will fight for a standard that honors God if it is not His own people (Ps 94)? Society will continue to press ideals that are contrary to Scripture. The local church must have an attractive answer that is faithful to Scripture, and this includes speaking about pornography clearly and in a manner that is attractive to those who are struggling.

Finally, this wholeness, from sexuality to spirituality, from covering the whole counsel of God for the sake of the church, is to be pursued without ceasing. The church must pray for those caught in the clutches of pornography without ceasing (1 Thess 5:16-18). This wholeness must be offered to those who are bound in the grips of pornography addiction, and even those who may be trapped within pornography production. The stakes are too high to pursue a spirituality, a relationship with Christ, that is less than everything one can offer. In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul states the following:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Cor 4:16-18).

The Gospel of Christ is the singular offering for those without hope and the church (its people, not just a physical building) is the place where this hope is found. The very Gospel of Christ will be all that can set someone free from the grips of pornography. Nothing more and nothing less will do for the stricken user. The tripartite impact of pornography consumption on the local church must be combatted to the very end of days. For God has not given victory to evil, but defeat. Pornography, one day, will die and perish for all of eternity. Until then, the battle rages on so that all might know, “the plans I have for, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a *future and hope*” (Jer 29:11).

¹ Erin Fuchs, “7 Reasons Why America Should Legalize Prostitution,” Business Insider (Business Insider, March 20, 2022), <https://www.businessinsider.com/why-america-should-legalize-prostitution-2013-11>.

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ABSTRACT

THE TRIPARTITE IMPACT OF PORNOGRAPHY CONSUMPTION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH: BRAIN, BODY, AND BALANCE OF LIFE.

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The tripartite impact of pornography on the brain, body, and balance of life, as well as the impact on the local church, is in need of further analysis and study. This need grows daily due to the ever increasing availability and production of explicit material like pornography. Consuming pornography is detrimental to the brain, body, and the balance of life. Chapter 1 serves as the introduction to the thesis project, outlining both the thesis itself, along with the methodology and general summaries of research. Chapter 2 seeks to explain the impact that pornography wreaks upon the brain when left unattended, focusing mainly on the chemical interactions that occur within the brain. Chapter 3 seeks to provide how pornography impacts the body, especially in the area of healthy sexual function. Chapter 4 culminates the impact caused on the brain and the body by looking at how addiction takes control over a normal balanced life. Chapter 5 offers a Christian perspective on how pornography can be overcome, and the individual restored to a healthy life of community and recovery. Chapter 6 concludes the project by summarizing the work as a whole. While many projects have addressed the destructive nature of pornography, academia may benefit from addressing the brain, the body, and the balance of life as a whole when reviewing the devastating results of pornography on consumers.

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