

**Wired for Intimacy.** How pornography hijacks the male brain. By William M. Struthers.



  
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## Introduction

WHAT IS IT ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY that makes it so appealing to so many men? Why does a naked female body or a movie of a woman having sex seem to hijack a man's brain, hypnotizing him and rendering him incapable of making good decisions? Why might a man who is married to a lovely wife risk that relationship for a ten-second video clip of a couple having sex? What is it about being male that makes it so difficult for men to look away?

While pornography ravages and destroys the lives of both men and women, this book and the research within focuses almost exclusively on pornography's impact on men. It is true that women are increasingly becoming consumers of pornography, but there is little doubt that it is primarily men who are hooked on it. And the reasons that women view pornography are very different than the reasons men do. Men seem to be wired in such a way that pornography hijacks the proper functioning of their brains and has a long-lasting effect on their thoughts and lives.

As a biopsychologist and a person of faith, I am in a unique position to engage many of the questions posed above. It is hard to be a Christian in the United States and not be sensitive to the pervasive influence of pornography and the warped views of sexuality that saturate our culture. Pornography and the hypersexuality found in the media are almost impossible to avoid.

As I have looked more carefully at some of my Christian beliefs about sexuality and felt convicted to respond to the pornification of

our culture, I have had an unexpected opportunity to integrate my faith with my academic discipline. As I have studied how the brain develops, how hormones and culture affect it and how addictions and compulsions develop, it has become increasingly apparent to me why many men struggle so much. In this book I share this material, and I hope it can be a part of the healing process that so many long for.

Like many adolescent boys growing up in the 1980s, I had occasional opportunities to view lingerie catalogs in the mail and softcore pornography magazines stashed away by friends and relatives. These were my first exposures to the naked female form, eliciting what I now know to be sexual interest. As I grew older, frontal nudity and erotic sexual scenes in movies became readily viewable on cable television channels such as HBO and Playboy. Home videotapes made access to all types of pornography easier than ever before.

While I can't recall feeling a compelling attraction toward pornography, I won't deny that I found it hypnotizing when I stumbled upon it. But I was struck by the hold that it had over several of my teenage friends and their desire to expose me to it. Perhaps I was just late in my sexual awakening, but as I entered my twenties, my exposure to porn shifted into high gear. Legally an adult and living with other men who were enjoying the freedoms of college life, I was exposed to additional forms of pornography. I became increasingly aware of how many men subscribed to *Playboy* and regularly rented adult videos. I began to notice how many of my friends and acquaintances—men who by all other accounts would have made fine boyfriends and husbands—sacrificed relationships with real women for the allure of an image of a woman on the magazine page or videotape of a couple having sex. I admit that I was not a saint and did not avert my eyes from every temptation. I believe that it is only by the grace of God that I was mostly spared from the seductive draw of the pornographic page and screen.

I can think of many ways I have benefited from computer technologies and the vast knowledge available on the Internet. But I also delete

dozens of e-mails each day that solicit pornographic material, sexual enhancement products or opportunities for sexual encounters. My workplace has an Internet filter, but sexually explicit material is easy to access if you are determined. I put on self-imposed blinders as I wade through tantalizing advertisements with Victoria's Secret models in the margins of my weather forecast. My Internet service provider's homepage is littered with dating services ("Hot Single Girls in Your Neighborhood Looking for Love!") and my sports websites have galleries of scantily clad cheerleaders. If I watch a soccer match on television with my children, I have to be vigilant to change the channel when commercials for Viagra are aired. In a world that has been hypersexualized, it is hard to get through the day without being battered and numbed by the intrusions of pornography.

Many people have asked me if I have ever looked at pornography. I'm not sure if the question is geared to label me a hypocrite or to appeal to an "everybody does it" mentality. When I tell them that I find many things on television or on newsstands pornographic, they frown. Apparently this makes me a prude, which is worse than being a hypocrite. Yes, I have viewed pornography because *it is everywhere*. You cannot get away from it; if you don't view it intentionally, you will unintentionally. The result is that repeated exposure to pornography and the objectification of the female body changes the way our brains see each other. Repeated exposure to any stimulus results in neurological circuit making. That is how we learn. But what does pornography teach and how does it change those who regularly consume it?

My journey in asking this question began several years ago when, as a faculty member at a Christian college, two significant things happened. First, I knew three men in different stages of life and from varied backgrounds who had problems with pornography and engaged in sexually inappropriate behaviors. These men had allowed pornography to warp their idea of sexuality, impacting them and their families negatively. Watching these men deal with the consequences of their problems was exceptionally painful. In one situation, I felt that I had unknowingly contributed to the breakdown of one man's

marriage by encouraging him to discover the wonders of the Internet for quick and easy stock trading. Instead he discovered it as a gateway to free pornography and depravity.

A second factor was an upper-division psychology class I taught called Men and Addictions. In part of this course, I spent a significant amount of time exploring findings about men's struggles with pornography and compulsive sexual behaviors. We evaluated whether or not a person could become addicted to porn and if it should be classified as a clinical problem. This component to the course turned out to be an invitation for hordes of college-aged men to visit me during my office hours. There they confided that they felt trapped by their inability to stop consuming pornography. The weight of the guilt they carried was heartbreaking.

I began the process of seeking out therapeutic options for these men and came across statistics about the adult entertainment industry. I was flabbergasted at the economics and demographics of it all. I met regularly with these young men and referred them to counselors when appropriate. It became apparent that many of them were dealing with significant emotional and spiritual wounds that had resulted from their experience with pornography. This book is a result of the great need for healing that I saw in these men as a result of pornography consumption.

My personal agenda will be clearly evident to anyone who reads this book. It stems from my Christian faith and my desire that each person fully understand how we all are unique and appreciate how much we share in common as human beings created in the image of God. My faith requires that every human life be viewed as sacred and the dignity of every individual be respected and honored. When we better understand the devastating spiritual, psychological, social and biological reality of how pornography violates our unique position in God's creation, we will be better able to minister to those who have been wounded by it.

Because of this perspective, I view pornography as an institutional evil that preys on the disaffected, wounded and desperate members of

society. I believe that even those who wholeheartedly embrace pornography's lie of sexual fulfillment and freedom (whether producers, actors or consumers) are still loved by God. Our calling as Christians is to examine ourselves and walk alongside those who have been damaged by this evil. We are not to demonize others, but to share God's healing, grace and mercy as they discover their identity in Christ. Healing and right thinking about our sexual nature are found in the person of Jesus Christ, Scripture, the power of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the church.

Many excellent books have been written by Christian authors who explain in plain terms how men can deal with pornography. They use language common in Christian culture and easy for many men to grab hold of: lust of the flesh, sexual sin, diseased soul, sexual idolatry. Much good comes from using this language when wrestling with the reality of pornography. Many of these authors rightly frame pornography as more than just an ethical or legal matter—it is a *spiritual* matter.

Pornography is also a *physical* matter, rooted in the biological intricacies of our sexual design. In my opinion, nowhere is the complexity of our sexual nature seen more than in the wiring of the brain. Our reproductive organs are often given too much attention in the discussion of sexuality. It is the brain, however, where we feel the sexual longing, the arousal, the focus and the ecstasy that comes from sexual intimacy. Using spiritual and psychological language to describe the tenacious grip of sexually destructive patterns is helpful. But calls to pray harder, move the computer to the living room and get plugged into an accountability group only go so far. They come across as hollow to many men whose brains have been altered and rewired by their experiences with pornography. They have trained their brains to respond sexually to the pornography they consume.

We need to move to the next stage of dealing with pornography, cybersex addictions and sexual compulsions. We can find healthy ways to train the male brain to understand and act on its sexual nature. By appreciating our created nature and acknowledging pornog-

raphy's unhealthy impact on our brain (and the rest of our body), we have a better path forward.

I hope that as recent scholarship in the brain sciences reframes and informs our ideas about how we are made, we can develop a better understanding of how fearfully and wonderfully made we are. Pornography taps into many men's wrong thinking about themselves, in places where their brains are most vulnerable to exploitation. But as we appreciate the reality of our sexuality and place it within the biblical narrative, we will see hope for redemption. As we more clearly see our need for redemption and the path of sanctification, we will be better equipped to heal from the wounds of pornography and allow our sexuality to be a necessary part of the process by which we are conformed to the image of Christ.



## Saturated with Porn

PORNOGRAPHY IS DIFFICULT TO WRITE ABOUT for a variety of reasons. First, as a Christian, to even address it is to walk straight into the lion's den. I've received a mixture of odd glances and comments whenever I tell people that I am writing a book on pornography. "Oh, I get it . . . you're doing *research*. So do you look at it?" they ask. I find the jovial attitude some people have toward pornography disconcerting and disheartening. As a person of faith, I believe that pornography is a medium that degrades both men and women while offering the lie of on-demand sexual fulfillment, primarily to men. It is an industry that has saturated our culture and extends around the world. It is at the same time both an advertisement for sexual promiscuity and a product for consumption (Jensen et al., 1998; Jensen, 2007).

Pornography dishonors the image of God in an individual by treating him or her as a sexual object to be consumed directly or indirectly. Taking its name from the Greek terms *porne* and *graphein*, pornography is literally the writing about prostitutes (Paul, 2005). The current porn industry has capitalized on the commercialization of human sexuality as a commodity just as prostitution does.

Pornography takes human sexuality out of its natural context—intimacy between two human beings—and makes it a product to be bought and sold. By debasing the human body and valuing it in the same way we would something from the local convenience store, pornography promotes a human being's sexuality as a product for consumption. The product, another's sexuality, is evaluated through our

own set of selfish needs. Which video, magazine or website will get me what I want with the maximum payoff? The pornographic selection may be consumed once, occasionally or on an ongoing basis, like a never-ending bottle of ketchup. When it no longer meets my sexual needs or fantasies, it can be thrown away. No need to recycle here. The law of supply and demand ensures there will always be another video, magazine or website.

Just as food is consumed and digested by the body, pornography is consumed by the senses and digested by the brain. In the digestive process, food is broken down so that it can supply the body with energy. Waste products are excreted to ensure the health of the organism. Similarly, pornography is taken into the brain via our senses, primarily through sight and touch. However, there is no process for the “waste” products associated with pornography to be removed. Pornography and our response to it alter our brain in a way that is difficult to undo. Pornography is the consumption of sexual poison that becomes part of the fabric of the mind.

## **PORNOGRAPHY AND THE FABRIC OF CULTURE**

It should come as no surprise to anyone that pornography is big business. The estimated financial size of the worldwide sex industry is around \$57 billion, with \$12 billion (just over 20 percent) coming from the United States. While adult videos constitute the bulk of the porn industry, its tentacles are in many other media as well: magazines, escort services, strip clubs, phone sex, pay-per-view cable channels and adult content websites. It is significant that much of this industry is visual.

While there is debate about how big the adult entertainment industry actually is and how much money is generated by it, there is little doubt that the availability of pornography has dramatically increased over the past twenty-five years. With the advent of home video machines in the 1980s and the Internet in the 1990s, our culture has become saturated with sexually explicit and suggestive material. Porn has moved from seedy corner magazine stands and adult video stores

to the privacy of our homes, offices and dorm rooms. The result is that pornography has crept into an astounding number of private lives. Because of its proliferation, the taboos that were once associated with it have been reduced or removed. Pornography today has become an accepted part of life for much of society.

I was recently listening to a sports radio talk show. The hosts abruptly switched from a discussion of Chicago sports teams to an invitation for callers to phone in with their nominations for the most creative “performance” names of adult film stars. Each of the hosts rattled off a number of risqué names without much hesitation. It was only a matter of minutes until their phone lines were jammed with callers chiming in with their favorites. The segment was immediately followed by one of their regular advertisers: a “gentleman’s club.” My guess is that this was not necessarily the result of any planning on the producer’s part. The advertisements on the sports radio stations target their male audience just as powerfully as the billboards that I see whenever I drive to Chicago’s O’Hare airport. Even in the isolation of our cars, the airwaves and skyline remind us that we are not free from the influence of the sex industry.

Many Christians find themselves in a cultural battle to protect both themselves and their children from this onslaught of sexual permissiveness. Pornography and the wider sex industry have brazenly walked through the front doors of the mass media into our televisions, computers and cell phones. See how long you can go without viewing or hearing something that has clear ties to the sex industry. The message is clear: Sex doesn’t just sell—it is the motivation for living.

The movie *American Pie* has a number of sexually oriented scenes that are indicative of our cultural situation. In one scene, the main character is so desperate to see a pornographic movie that he vigilantly strains to make out the sexual images that have been distorted by a cable scrambler. His parents catch him masturbating to the warped images, and standard sophomoric humor ensues. In another scene the gawky father gives pornographic magazines to his son as a sort of rite of passage. Later, the young man webcasts his “seduction”

of a foreign exchange student, with disastrous results.

I realize that *American Pie* is just a movie. It is not a documentary, and the director would probably say that it doesn't depict any actual events. But *American Pie* resonated with many young men, grossing over \$235 million at the box office. Many young men can relate to the curiosity and magnetic power of the female form, the ritualistic introduction to pornography and the use of the Internet as a tool for sexual voyeurs.

In contrast, consider the outcry after the Janet Jackson breast-baring incident during the Super Bowl XXXVIII television halftime show in February of 2004. The 9/16th-of-a-second flash of her breast on television prompted thousands of angry letters to the Federal Communications Commission, which led to a fine being levied against CBS, an apology from Ms. Jackson and one of the highest Tivo replays on digital television recorders to date. The irony was that Ms. Jackson was for the most part fully clothed and that viewers had been exposed to numerous shots of cheerleaders gyrating in skin-tight pants. I wondered which was worse: an "accidental" glimpse of a bare breast or the lecherous, lingering "go-to-commercial" shots of NFL cheerleaders' cleavage?

What makes the outcry and the apology even more hollow is the lack of protest at the images of a near-naked Janet Jackson (and many other female celebrities) on the covers of music, celebrity and men's interest magazines over the past few years. The sexually titillating images are everywhere and relatively ignored. They have so subtly crept into the fabric of the culture that we have become desensitized and immune to them.

This influence of pornography is found on television as well. An episode of *Friends* details the addictive and mind-altering effects that free access to cable pornography has on Chandler and Joey. They refuse to let anyone turn off the television, lest their access be taken away. The following exchange shows pornography's effect on their perceptions of women:

Chandler: I was just at the bank and there was this really hot teller, and she didn't ask me to go do it with her in the vault!

Joey: Same kind of thing happened to me! Woman pizza-delivery guy comes over, gives me the pizza, takes the money, and leaves!

Chandler: What? No "Nice apartment, I bet the bedrooms are huge"?

Joey: No! Nothing!

Chandler: You know what? We have to turn off the porn.

Chandler and Joey both begin to believe that all women in real life are like the women in the pornography. Viewing porn changed their expectations of and interactions with women. While the episode is fictional, the impact of pornography on men's lives is very similar.

Whether it be strip clubs or prostitutes, Internet porn or phone sex lines, the sex industry preys on two sets of people: the consumers (the buyer) and the consumed (those involved in its production). Anyone who cruises pornographic websites, rents movies or buys magazines adds to the demand for pornography. Each website visit is used to recruit additional advertising monies and more content. Each video that is rented increases the demand for more releases. The consumer of pornography may not be doing anything illegal, but they add fuel to the inferno that is the sex industry. And sadly, it is fueled by the human souls who are involved in its production (Leahy, 2008).

## **EVALUATING PORNOGRAPHY**

There are a number of ways that pornography can be evaluated. Some take an anecdotal approach—talking about it from their personal perspective, what they have seen, what they think about it, how it has affected them. Others discuss it within the context of society—an issue of free speech, a matter of censorship, political regulation, violence against women. Pornography can be construed as an art form, or as one of many avenues for the expression of sexuality in the media. Religious institutions have much to say about the morality of pornog-

raphy. Many church groups have engaged it socially (like protests) and theologically (from the pulpit).

When you delve into the minefield of pornography research, a number of things become quickly apparent. The first is that there is an enormous volume of literature on the topic from any number of disciplines, including sociology, philosophy, theology, psychology and business. Few people have the time or expertise to be experts in all of these fields (I am not an exception to that rule). My training is in biopsychology, and the research in this area is scattered across journals ranging from urology to brain imaging to endocrinology.

The human being is an incredibly complex and beautiful creation, and our sexuality is one of the more complex aspects of who we are, not one of its simpler ones. But we are more than just sexual, reproducing animals. As a faculty member at a Christian liberal arts college, I have had the opportunity to explore the topic of theological anthropology. I have been enormously blessed by those who have thought deeply about what it means to be fully human. How are we created in God's image? What is our role in the story of creation? These questions are just as complex as those surrounding the functioning of our brains.

### **THE THREE DODGES**

As I waded through the morass of published books and journal articles, I found a handful of scholars and clinical practitioners who have examined pornography and how it has infiltrated our culture. Jensen, Dines and Russo (Jensen et al., 1998) describe the Three Dodges as ways that many in the pornography debate try to obscure what pornography really is. These dodges confuse the issue by “dodging” and derailing any criticism of the industry or medium.

### **THE DEFINITION DODGE**

What is pornography? How do you define the legal term “pornography”? Who decides what is pornographic?

The first dodge is all about semantics. At the core of the Definition

Dodge is the deflection of attempts to define in clear, straightforward terms what is pornographic. This dodge becomes a tool by which many avoid the topic. If you can't define it clearly, why bother getting upset about it? The Definition Dodge becomes a shield that many in favor of free access to porn hide behind by focusing narrowly on how to describe pornography. "What's pornography to you is art to me," they claim. Pornography is in the eye of the beholder.

Many argue that pornography is culturally defined and that culture changes. This line of reasoning is rooted in an ethical relativism that most college sophomores would be able to intellectually dismantle if inclined to do so. But this relativism is seductive. It becomes a convenient crutch whenever we are confronted with dilemmas that make us uncomfortable. The question of definition is a valid point, but the dodge relies on a moral and linguistic relativism that short-circuits any dialogue on the matter.

When any definition is provided, the conversation is redirected toward finding loopholes in the definition. Is pornography the depiction of a naked body? If that is the definition, we have to classify thousands of pieces of what are clearly art as pornography. Are there different levels of pornography? Where do you draw the line? And if you do draw a line, does it become a slippery slope? Rather than agreeing on a working definition, the goal of the Definition Dodge is to establish a roadblock so that the plain effects of pornography are never addressed.

In 1964, a landmark case ruled on by the United States Supreme Court offered one of the more memorable (and often ridiculed) examples of the Definition Dodge in action. An Ohio theater manager, Nico Jacobellis, appealed a state Supreme Court decision upholding his conviction and fine for showing a French film, *The Lovers*. The scene in question was a love scene that was controversial at the time. It would pale by today's standards and would probably be considered standard fare for many cable channels. In *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart addressed the difficulty of defining "hardcore pornography" within the context of a legal definition of

*obscenity*. His comments are somewhat notorious.

I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description [hardcore pornography]; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that. (*Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 1964)

“I know it when I see it” has become a mocked phrase by pornography’s advocates when dealing with a working definition of pornography. In a culture drifting into moral relativism, who decides what is pornographic? By this standard, pornography is offered as a form of art. Justice Stewart’s remarks are echoed in C. S. Lewis’s allegory *The Pilgrim’s Regress* (Lewis, 1981). The protagonist, John, is held captive by the Spirit of the Age. John is given milk to drink, and after he extols the pleasant taste of the milk, the jailor who brought it to him chides him. Milk, he argues, is no different from any other substance that comes out of a cow’s orifice, like dung, urine, vomit or sweat. John sighs and names his jailor as “a liar or only a fool, that you see no difference between that which Nature casts out as refuse and that which she stores up as food.”

To a clearly ordered mind and conscience, the distinction between pornography and art is easily discernable if not readily definable. There is a clear difference between artistic nudity and the exploitation of the human form and sexuality. Those who wish to value artistic expression can ask a series of questions to distinguish pornography from true art.

1. How are women (and men) portrayed? Are they portrayed as people or objects to be lusted after?
2. How is sexual intimacy represented? Is it within a marital relationship or in isolation?
3. What is the purpose intended by the producer of the image (or media)?



4. What motivations do you (the viewer) bring to the exchange?
5. How explicit is the image? How much is left to the imagination?

Pornography inherently degrades and dehumanizes. Art celebrates the meaning and value of sexual intimacy between two individuals. In the exchange between artist and viewer in the artistic medium, it is important to consider the motives of the artist (producer) and the nature of the image. The artist wants to communicate a message or elicit an emotion from the audience. Gifted artists with pure motives can produce works of art that elicit powerful emotions or make profound statements. But regardless of one's motive and skill, the artist has a limited ability to control the motives of the audience.

In the most straightforward exchange, the artist's purposes are accomplished when an open audience receives the handiwork and responds as the artist intended. But this is not always the case. An artist can only do so much in creating a piece of art that celebrates the person depicted in it. A classic piece of art that is a nude can become a piece of pornography to a warped mind. Indeed a warped mind can make anything perverted. If the heart, mind and motives of the viewer are steeped in selfishness and perversion, even the greatest works of celebration can drive someone further into depravity. Consider the Song of Songs. It is an example of an erotic piece of literature with deep spiritual worth, but to a warped mind it can become a prelude to sexual fantasy and mental perversion.

Pornography is a medium where the intentions of the artist and the response of the viewer are just as important as the content of the medium. An artist may intend a portrait to be a celebration of beauty (i.e., a beautiful face), and the portrait may be nothing more than an oil-based representation of a woman's face. But if the image is viewed by someone who mentally ravages the person for his or her own purposes, valuing the self above the other, it can become pornographic.

#### **PORNOGRAPHY DEFINED**

Pornography is derived from the Greek word *porne*, which can be

translated as “female captives” or “prostitutes.” *Porneia* is often translated as “fornication,” “whoredom” or “sexual immorality.” In the New Testament there are twenty-six references to *porneia*. Of these twenty-six, six occur in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. The context of these letters is that believers are not to conform to the cultural norms that the church found itself confronted with. Our bodies are not made for *porneia* (1 Cor 6:13), we should run from it (1 Cor 6:18), we should not seek it out (1 Cor 7:2) and we should repent if we fall prey to it (2 Cor 12:21) (Bowring, 2005, p. 30).

In opposition to *porneia*, the apostle Paul offers an alternative: purity. For the Christian, purity is not limited to our sexual behavior but is the result of the process of sanctification. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul instructs, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8). Purity is as much a matter of the mind as it is of the body, and it is important not to separate the two. The thoughts we think affect our body. The behaviors that we engage in affect our thinking. The interaction between thought and body is rooted in the neurobiology of the brain. Thoughts and behavior are woven together and intertwined with one another. This is how pornography and unhealthy sexuality pollutes the brain and the body together.

So what is pornography? Despite the difficulty in providing a definition that everyone can agree upon (because of the Definition Dodge), here are a few:

- The depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement. (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*)
- Pornography is the material sold in the pornography shops for the purpose of producing sexual arousal for mostly male consumers. (Jensen et al., 1998)
- Sexually explicit pictures, writing, or other material whose primary purpose is to cause sexual arousal. (*American Heritage Dictionary*)

- Obscene writings, drawings, photographs, or the like, esp. those having little or no artistic merit. (Dictionary.com)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* addresses pornography as well:

2354 *Pornography* consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials.

For my money's worth, I prefer the definition put forward in the *Catechism*. Your choice might be another, but then again, that is at the core of the Definition Dodge.

### **THE CONSTITUTIONAL DODGE**

With the Constitutional Dodge, pornography's proponents argue that the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects the freedom to produce, market and distribute pornography in the context of free speech and free press. This appeals to our sense of independence and autonomy. Cries of "censorship" call out to the individualist in each of us, and the implied notion that we are not capable of responsible conduct rankles our pride. *Who makes the laws that say what grown men and women should be allowed to look at? Why should I trust them? Why do I need a law to tell me what I can and can't view?*

This dodge is another approach used to silence those who would speak against the porn industry. The Constitutional Dodge argues that pornographers are not producing material that is harmful, because all of their participants are consenting adults. They are merely meeting the market demand for sexually explicit material. Everyone is happy, so why legislate against it?

There are clear and obvious problems with this dodge. Some forms of pornography are already legislated against; the best example is child pornography. We do legislate what forms of pornography may be produced and consumed. Any retreat to a legal position which denies pornography's real-world effects on people—the emotional, social and psychological impact of pornography on the producers, participants and consumers both young and old—is nothing short of irresponsible. By highlighting the difficulties surrounding the passing and enforcing of reasonable legislative restrictions on pornographic material, the Constitutional Dodge prevents meaningful social discussion and misses the reality that pornography wounds its participants.

### **THE CAUSAL DODGE**

Finally, for those of us in the research community, we run into difficulty with what may be referred to as the Causal Dodge. The technique behind this dodge is to highlight the limitations of research involving pornography. Today we live in a society that prefers its questions be answered by “scientific experts.” However, the use of the scientific method becomes problematic when making ethical or legal statements about what to do with the results of these studies. Scientific theories are for making connections between variables, not determining their moral status. The Causal Dodge highlights this.

In most social and behavioral sciences there are three major approaches to studying a phenomenon. The first is a *descriptive* approach. With the descriptive approach, scientists attempt to objectively observe and describe what is present in the world. This approach uses case studies, surveys and naturalistic observation (just watching people). With this approach, a phenomenon is systematically described. The second approach is known as a *correlational* design. In correlational studies, researchers attempt to mathematically measure if the presence or absence of any one variable can reliably predict the presence or absence of another. For example: (1) do SAT scores reliably predict college GPA, or (2) does knowledge about a man's marital

status provide any insight about his income? In a correlational design a relationship between two things is being established. One limitation of this design is the directionality of the relationship is undetermined. Consider our examples from above:

1. Do SAT scores reliably predict college GPA? It would appear that there is another variable (such as intelligence or scholastic aptitude) that is the underlying factor that causes both high SAT and high college GPA. Both of these tests might just be measuring the same causal variable (and this variable may be changing across time—intelligence increased with education, for example).
2. Does marital status provide any insight about a man's income? If we find that married men make more money than unmarried men, does that mean that getting married makes you a more stable person and thereby increases your performance at work (resulting in promotions) or that men who are better off financially attract women who are willing to marry them?

It becomes a “which came first, the chicken or the egg?” conundrum. Because of the limitations of how correlation research is conducted, you cannot make statements about the directionality (A causes B) of the variables measured. These types of causal statements are restricted to experimental approaches. Thus the Causal Dodge (or perhaps it should be called the Correlational/Causal Dodge) focuses narrowly on the limitations of correlational research in establishing causal relationships, deflecting criticism that pornography can have harmful effects.

The hallmark of *experimental* designs is manipulation of a variable (the causal or independent variable) by the researcher. This is followed by observation of the effects on another variable (the affected or dependent variable). Manipulating an independent variable and holding all other variables as constant as possible allows researchers to infer that any changes in the dependent variable are caused by differences in the independent variable. In this way, the direction of the relation-

ship can be established (one variable is changed and changes in the other follow) and the majority of alternate (or confounding) explanations are minimized. The experimental approach gives greater confidence in saying that altering one variable causes a change in another.

The problem in much behavioral and social science research is that the experimental approach is often not feasible, nor is it ethical. To conduct a robust “experiment” on the developmental effects of pornography on children would require taking a number of individuals (let’s say they are all genetic clones to minimize the effects of genetics), raising them under the exact same parenting conditions, minimizing their exposure to the outside world so that their life histories are as similar as possible, and then randomly assigning them into one of two groups. One group would be exposed to pornography and the other group prevented from seeing pornography (the independent variable). After a year we send them out into the world and see if there are any differences in any number of their behaviors (dependent variables). These might include porn-seeking behavior, attitudes toward women, sexual acts of violence, mental health issues or anything else porn might affect. Only under these types of conditions can you say that porn *causes* something else.

I hope the absurdity of this is apparent. If all of the current data regarding pornography is correlational and not causal, nothing can be definitively concluded about its impact, either negative or positive. This is at the heart of the Causal Dodge. The tobacco industry was able to hide behind this dodge for over fifty years. Smoking doesn’t *cause* lung cancer because all of that research is correlational, right? It *may* cause lung cancer (as the Surgeon General’s warning labels said), because it was *correlational* research, not experimental. Yet whenever there actually is a causal effect, a correlational relationship automatically follows. Sometimes it is true that where there is smoke, there is fire (pardon the pun).

The Causal Dodge worked for the tobacco industry for over fifty years, so it is not surprising that the porn industry has followed suit. The same argument is made. Because so little experimental research

has been done on pornography and that much of what has been done is either descriptive or correlational, the issue is confused and the conclusion is drawn that pornography doesn't cause anything. The presence of correlations between exposure to pornography and a host of social, psychological, emotional and spiritual problems is the smoke. The ethical and practical limitations in proving there is a fire should not temporarily assuage us into a place where we deny that the fire exists. A better place to begin is to recognize that pornography is a significant contributing factor to many psychological and social ills.

### **THE THREE AS OF THE INTERNET**

While many scholars may claim that modern pornography didn't really exist until the Victorian Era, it has been around for quite some time (Paul, 2005). Depictions of individuals engaging in sexual acts and materials that sexually arouse and titillate have been present for most of human history. But recent advances in the production, distribution and delivery of pornography have created such a realistic representation of sexual intercourse that it rivals the real thing.

Like the Bible, the Internet is filled with tales of the transforming power of romantic love, as well as the destructiveness of misguided sexuality. People are people and are beset with yearnings, temptations, appetites, and lusts that have neither much changed, nor abated, over the millennia. . . . [H]umans have always faced sexual choices with the potential to lead them to decadence or transcendence. However, unlike the days of the Old Testament, the added element of computer technology makes modern times qualitatively different. (Cooper, 2002, pp. 1-2)

Pornography is often a driving force behind new technology, and it is no surprise that the Internet is the fertile soil where much pornography and pornography-related compulsions have their roots. The Three As of the Internet are accessibility, affordability and anonymity (Cooper, 2000). While the Three Dodges are used to prevent

meaningful dialogue on the topic, the Three As address the reasons pornography has flourished online. These are the major reasons why the Internet has become such a powerful influence in the spread of pornography and the ease with which it has grabbed hold of so many men.

### **ACCESSIBILITY**

Pornography is now much more accessible than ever before. Twenty years ago you needed to go to a specialty shop and actually interact with another human being to purchase a dirty magazine or rent a pornographic video. The prospect of someone seeing you purchase the material, cultural frowning upon of the pornography industry and the shame from being seen often produced enough fear to make many men avoid purchasing it altogether. These days, however, pornography is readily available on your computer, television or through mail order. You don't have to go into a shop to purchase it; it is only a few keystrokes and mouse clicks away.

### **AFFORDABILITY**

Because of the ease of access, pornography is also much more affordable. In fact, a significant amount of online pornography is free. Many gateway sites offer free sample content, usually a small number of pictures or short video clips that are easily downloaded. These websites act as portals through which this free material is accessed without charge.

How do these sites stay online? Is it a pornographic version of altruism, maintaining a webpage at a person's individual expense to provide free material to the public? In some cases the answer is yes, but in most cases these sites receive advertising revenue from sponsors. These sponsors help keep these consolidated sample content sites in business for the express purpose of directing more traffic to their paid sites. The free samples can be fairly static (i.e., pictures, short video clips), but they whet the sexual appetite of the viewer and promise additional content for a fee. Those fees may not be exorbitant, but if a four-dollar fee for monthly access is paid by fifty thou-



sand subscribers, that's a monthly revenue of \$200,000. Portions of that are used to pay the gateway sites a modest advertising fee, and the remaining profit can be divided to procure additional material.

In a single day of shooting, three or four adult actors can film a number of sexual scenes that are easily prepared as still pictures, soft-core and/or hardcore movies for both physical and online distribution. Production costs can be minimal, and amateur material lends to the feeling that "this could actually happen to me" or "these could be people in my neighborhood." This seeming reality serves to heighten the arousal in some men and appeals to a particular porn demographic. Combined with relatively affordable access to movie production equipment (complete with high-quality commercial cameras and video editing software) and inexpensive web hosting and programming, low-budget porn can be produced anywhere. It can be webcams set up for interactive sex chat or digital photography uploaded to a pay-for-access website. Porn is no longer manufactured and distributed only by technical experts in the San Fernando Valley, but in suburban and rural communities across the country.

### **ANONYMITY**

People hide their porn habits and try to make sure that no one else finds out. Porn users put as many barriers as possible between themselves and others so that plausible deniability can always be maintained. Anonymous online technologies contribute to this cycle of secrecy.

If you are sitting alone in your home accessing porn in private, no one knows who you are. You don't have to go out and run the risk of someone actually seeing you purchase it. The use of porn on the Internet has increased in an astounding fashion in the past ten or fifteen years. The social stigma associated with watching porn has diminished over the years, and any remaining shame is easily addressed by hiding in the confines of a dorm room, bedroom, office or den. Your service provider might monitor which sites you are viewing, but even then your identity is relatively anonymous. You can change your online identity and pretend to be someone else.

Anonymity can also lead to hyperpersonal relationships online. Freed from any prospect of accountability and the absence of a real person in front of them, the anonymity available online leads some men to relate differently with other anonymous partners than they do with people in real life. They reveal things about themselves that they normally would not, increasing the likelihood of engaging in risky behavior.

### THE TRIPLE-C ENGINE

In his book *Sex and the Internet: A Guide for Clinicians*, clinical psychologist Al Cooper (Cooper, 2002) explores the notion that the Internet is driven by what he calls the “Triple-C Engine.” The Internet is not a static, passive medium for the viewer, but one in which people can interact with the content. They are not merely passive consumers of the pornographic content, but the technology allows them to become potential senders in the process. They can *communicate* and *collaborate* as active members of a *community*.

**Communication.** Communication provides opportunities to share our lives with others. This is an important part of being human—telling your story and letting others know who you are. Today this can take place through electronic communication such as text messaging or connecting via webcam. Interacting with others reinforces the fact that others are acknowledging and responding to you. Why do we do it? Because it allows us to share our lives with others, despite the artificial nature of the interaction.

The ability to communicate with others through the Internet extends into pornography and makes it interactive. Porn need not be just a snapshot of nakedness or a sexual act that was recorded in the past, but it can be dynamic cybersexuality, communicating in real time. Men can webchat with a model on the other end and ask her to perform specific acts. Our sexuality is meant to be an embodied mutual exchange between husband and wife as they discover God’s love. Instead, the Internet serves as the relational medium in which sexual arousal and stimulation are channeled, and it operates as the communicative mediator in the expression of our sexuality.

**Collaboration.** A second engine, collaboration, allows people to work together toward a goal. One of the great benefits of the Internet is that it allows people who are separated by distance to interact with each other. But the Internet has also enabled the collection of warehouses of digital porn, the establishment of cyberprostitution and networks of illicit sexual materials. The collaborative nature of the Internet has allowed people to exercise their sexual brokenness, such as file sharing of digital child pornography libraries.

From a social perspective, once you start engaging in cybersexual behavior, you move from communication with other users of pornography to collaboration with one another. It develops from “Hey, check this out” (communication) to “Let’s get together and start making something” (collaboration). And whenever you collaborate, you begin establishing community.

**Community.** Those collectively sharing their lives with each other and working toward common goals will form a community (Rheingold, 2000). Those who share their porn with each other think of each other as fellow members in their social network. They share common interests, passions and characteristics. They follow certain rules about how they interact with each other and think of themselves as part of a larger group. As members of the community, they share with each other, participate with each other and even work toward meeting each other’s needs. Given the needs for connection and sexual expression that the Internet and pornography imperfectly meet, the logical outcome is that of a community of people who are bound together by the common bond of pornography.

## **THE PERFECT STORM**

It is not the shouting of pornography that gives it so much power over men. It is the whispering of the lie of sexual fulfillment that prey on our human insecurities. When men believe those lies, they develop psychological and behavioral habits that prevent relational fulfillment. Pornography shapes and rewires us in such a way that we become unable to see women as we should. We no longer direct

our sexual drives in appropriate ways. Porn narrows our ability to live a good and holy life.

In her article “The Porn Myth,” feminist Naomi Wolf argues that pornography has moved into the mainstream of the cultural arena, and in large part due to the Internet, it has “pornographized” our culture. She observes that many feminists were wrong in their assumption that pornography would turn men into raving sexual beasts bent on all forms of sexual mayhem. Instead, she argues, over the years the pervasiveness of pornography has rendered men less sexually responsive to real women.

I believe she is right. Pornography has numbed the healthy sexuality of men who are active consumers of it. Wolf writes,

For most of human history, the erotic images have been reflections of, or celebrations of, or substitutes for, real naked women. For the first time in human history, the images’ power and allure have supplanted that of real naked women. Today, real naked women are just bad porn. (Wolf, 2003)

So how did we get to this perfect storm of cultural, technological and psychological factors converging on so many men? How has pornography been able to hijack lives and blunt the expression of healthy sexuality? How should the Christian church respond to the current state of affairs? We need to see just how pornography corrupts us to our core. We need to go back and reexamine what it means to human—to be created in the image of God. We need to understand what it means to be created male. We need to have a theology that understands the importance of our sexuality and what this looks like for men. And we need to respond in a way that honors those who have been affected by pornography and to help in restoration, redemption and healing.

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