

Liberty University

**An Apologetic for the Reliability of Biblical Doctrine from Pornography Addiction and
Recovery**

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlins School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Christian Apologetics

by

Jacob Arrieta

Brandon, Florida

April 2023

Introduction

Sexual ethics (in general) and pornography (in particular) are incredibly hot topics in postmodern culture. The biblical sexual ethic, which was once normative across much of the Global West since the rise and spread of Christianity, is now viewed as outdated and oppressive in a postmodern culture that values individual freedoms above all else. No longer are institutions seen as trustworthy bastions of truth to help shape individuals into good people or proper citizens of a nation. Expert opinions are no longer sought out and used to shape and form the individuals' thoughts on a given topic unless they support what the individual already believes.

The individual is the supreme authority and the freedom to make choices in pursuit of an individual's inner desires are seen as the highest good.¹ Sexuality is one arena where individual choice has become an ideological battle ground. Specifically, an individual's sexual choices are seen as a source of identity, to be explored to the uttermost, rather than being the exclusive purview of married couples for the purpose of procreation, community, comfort, and mutual pleasure. This change in perspective since the 1940s has practically eliminated sexual taboos with the notable exception of pedophilia.²

One extension of the sexualization of culture is the growing prevalence and acceptability of pornography in society. The development of hyper stimulating internet pornography has led to a high level of compulsive use by a significant number of individuals that, in many cases, is a form of addiction. The following argument will seek to demonstrate that modern research into pornography addiction and addiction recovery; when compared to the biblical doctrines

¹ Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 63.

² Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 133.

regarding sexual activity, sin, and redemption; provide a holistic apologetic for the reliability of biblical doctrine as a whole and the Gospel specifically.

Methodology

Discussion about pornography addiction and recovery can come from many different schools of thought, and many articles and books have been written from a single perspective—either from a theological, scientific, moral, psychological, or sociological point of view. Occasionally, a paper will overlap two or three of these angles, but it is often that one serves as evidence for the other. For instance, a scientific paper about the most effective way to recover from pornography addiction may include references to the beneficial (or detrimental) effect of spirituality or faith in the recovery of an addict, but it will rarely, if ever, address issues of the theology of addiction or the moral epistemology of addiction in relation to scientific data. Well done syncretistic arguments are few and far between.

For this reason, the sources of evidence utilized came from different disciplines to create a holistic argument. The evidence was pulled from scientific works (including peer reviewed journals, research papers, and book length academic works), theological works (including the Bible, biblical commentaries, and systematic and topical theological works), and various other sources that have also been used including encyclopedias, works of cultural philosophy, and books on Christian morality.

The initial goal of the research was to identify the history of modern pornography, and to discover a working definition of both pornography and sexual addiction. Then, sources were introduced providing data regarding the number of pornography users, the frequency that they were using, and demographic information about the users. The second goal was to identify how sexual addiction initially took hold, and what the effects of the addiction were in all aspects of an

addict's life. The specific areas that were pinpointed for study were the physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual forces in an addict's life.

The third goal was to provide a study of the biblical doctrine of sex including what the scriptures had to say about the purposes and qualities of biblical sex. The goal of this section would be to demonstrate, through Scripture, the original meaning and purpose of sex using a limited systematic study. This would provide a theology of sexuality and give the appropriate context to understand how the corruption of human sexuality (through sin and sexual immorality) could result in detrimental physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual effects. Next, an apologetical exegesis of James 1:14-15 ESV was compared with the addiction cycle to demonstrate that the Bible had a clear and robust theology of how addiction starts, how it is maintained, and how recovery is possible long before the age of modern psychological addiction research.

The methodology would be to synergize the many different types of evidence to show how they overlap—specifically, how the Bible's model of sex is the way humans were meant to function, how pornography is a corruption of the biblical sexual model that is damaging to the individual, and how the Gospel provides the best method for recovering from pornography addiction.

The majority of the data used in this study was collected from library online databases with other sources being found through Google scholar, and resources associated with “the Conquer Series.”³ The sources were written by psychologists, statisticians, pastors, theologians, and medical doctors from a wide range of perspectives including secular, evangelical Christian,

³ Doug Weiss, Ted Roberts, and Timothy Jennings, “Conquer Series Episode” Directed by Jeremy Wiles. Kingdom Works Studios, 2013. Accessed 2022.

Mormon, and Catholic. The sources included books, journal articles, reference works, clinical treatment guides, statistical surveys, systematic theologies, and exegetical essays.

Data Analysis

The initial phase was to analyze the sources for themes and patterns and then to compile and categorize the information to show that modern research into pornography addiction provides an apologetic for Christian sexual ethics specifically and, more generally, for Christianity as a whole. While exploring the sources involving pornography addiction, the focus would be to discern the major themes of modern research and then to compile the findings of the research over the last fifty years. The result was one cohesive narrative explaining the main findings of the history and effects of pornography.

The second phase of data analysis was to gain a systematic understanding of the Christian theology of sex. This primarily involved a systematic study of scripture and the exegesis of James 1:13-15 ESV. The final stage data analysis involved a synthesis of the pornography addiction research evidence, and the biblical sexual evidence to demonstrate how the Gospel's teachings about forgiveness and community are the best recovery method according to scholars and theologians.

Chapter 1: History of Pornography in America

In many ways, the explosion in the prevalence and popularity of pornography is the logical culmination of expressive individualism, the sexual revolution, and technological development. Pornography is not a new concept. It has been historically present long before the American Sexual Revolution of the 1960s. Humanity has been fascinated with pleasure and sex for its entire recorded history. Ancient accounts of gods and goddess frequently included sexual

scenes and some cultures, Roman and Greek as examples, often included pornographic material in the public art.

In addition, the Hindu text called Kama Sutra has lengthy passages that would be considered pornographic. The difference between these historical examples of pornography and the modern version is one of both culture and technology. Culturally, the ancient examples were either not supposed to be examples of normative behavior—in the case of the Greek gods—or placed within a transcendent framework of what a good life should be, in the case of the Kama Sutra. Modern pornography has been removed from any metaphysical narrative, and exists now as a means of individual pleasure and expression.⁴

Technologically, pornography is now more widespread than it ever has been. In previous societies and time periods, literature or art of a sexual nature would have been available to a limited number of individuals who had the literacy, wealth, and leisure time to indulge in it.⁵ The advent of affordable mass-produced pornographic magazines in the 1950s greatly increased the number of individuals who were exposed to pornographic content. Then, the internet exponentially increased the quantity of material available, and the smart phone has made it possible to access the material almost anywhere. A full explanation of the history of pornography is beyond the scope of this paper and would include explanations for the breakdown of institutions, eroding of public trust in experts and organizations, development of technology, and a verity of economic developments. Therefore, a brief explanation of the ideas that made pornography acceptable and popular is in order.

⁴ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern*, 188.

⁵ Thaddeus Birchard and Joanna Benfield, *Routledge International Handbook of Sexual Addiction* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 74.

Alfred Kinsey was an American biologist and pioneer in sex research. He published two bodies of research called *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948)⁶ and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953).⁷ Among other things, these reports claimed that human beings were sexual from birth and therefore sexual behavior was neither morally good nor bad; it was simply natural. This biological research corresponded with previous psychological research conducted by Sigmund Freud who had come to much the same conclusions.⁸ These two researchers, despite their data having been repudiated and heavily criticized, gave a scientific rationale for the liberation of sexual behavior from morality and any metaphysical narrative.

Following in their footsteps, Hugh Hefner made pornography respectable and popular with his highly successful magazine, *Playboy*. Although the nudity in the magazine Hefner created is tame by today's standards, the combination of thoughtful articles with pictures of nude beautiful women was a stroke of marketing genius. The list of writers and interviewees for *Playboy* includes many well respected and prominent individuals from movies, literature, philosophy, music, politics, and science. It includes names of people like Ayn Rand, Orson Wells, Jimmy Carter, Bertrand Russel, Michael Caine, and Grace Kelly. The presence of many successful women on the roster gave even more credence to *Playboy* being a "discerning, thoughtful, engaged, artistic hedonism."⁹ Alfred Kinsey, Sigmund Freud, and Hugh Hefner are only a sampling of the scientists, philosophers, artists, and businessmen who have contributed to the current culture dominance of pornography.

⁶ Alfred C. Kinsey et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1948).

⁷ Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*.

⁸ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 188.

⁹ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 179.

Carl Trueman suggests in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* that the most telling sign of cultural acceptance of pornography is the fact that many people in the pornography industry are household names.¹⁰ Additionally, Trueman points to the highly sexualized nature of movies, television shows, and pop music as further evidence that sex (in a pornographic sense) is normal and expected.¹¹ Any person who spends time on a modern media streaming service and attempts to find a movie or television show without any sexual elements in it will discover the highly sexualized nature of modern culture.

Chapter 2: Prevalence of Pornography

To this point, pornography has been discussed and a brief history of the topic has been traced, but it has not yet been defined. *Merriam-Webster* defines pornography as “the depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement.”¹² This subjective definition is useful because different images and behaviors are sexually arousing to a greater or lesser degree for some people and not others.

One could ask how widespread pornography use is in society. Chisholm and Gall’s 2015 study stated that 93% of boys and 62% of girls will have at least one encounter with pornography before the age of eighteen and that 32% of college age men and 4% of college age women report viewing pornography three to five times a week.¹³ Moreover, it is not just a problem for the young. Some forty million Americans of all ages are regularly viewing pornography, and 10% of

¹⁰ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 180.

¹¹ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 186.

¹² “Pornography Definition & Meaning,” in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, n.d. Accessed May 28, 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pornography>.

¹³ Myles Chisholm and Terry Lynn Gall, “Shame and the X-Rated Addiction: The Role of Spirituality in Treating Male Pornography Addiction,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 22, no. 4 (February 2015): 260.

the American population has a high enough usage rate to be considered addicted to pornography.¹⁴ This statistic is understated when viewed through a Christian worldview or mental health lens.

Although Carnes and Adams state that 10% of Americans are sexual addicts, the definition of “addict” means that their pornography usage has impacted their life in a detrimental way, and they continued to compulsively seek out and view pornographic content.¹⁵ Carnes advocates the use of three parameters when diagnosing an individual with a sexual addiction:

1. An obsession or preoccupation with obtaining, using or recovering from the substance or behavior
2. A loss of control, as exhibited by a persistent desire and/or unsuccessful efforts to curtail or stop use of the substance or behavior.
3. Continued use of the substance or behavior despite adverse consequences.¹⁶

These parameters are narrow and designed to help clinicians identify those individuals who have developed a sexually compulsive addiction. They exclude many more Americans who view pornography on a regular basis and still experience similar negative effects, but have not developed a compulsive disorder.

A 2016 analysis of data collected between 2008 and 2014 demonstrated that 46% of men surveyed between the ages of eighteen to thirty-nine admitted to viewing pornography in the last week. Some 56% admitted to viewing it in the last month. Women were also surveyed, and 16% of 18- to 39-year-olds responded that they had viewed pornography in the last week and 26% in the last month.¹⁷

¹⁴ Timothy E. Clinton and Eric Scalise, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Addictions and Recovery Counseling: 40 Topics, Spiritual Insights, and Easy-to-Use Action Steps* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 227.

¹⁵ Patrick J. Carnes and Kenneth M. Adams, *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 427.

¹⁶ Carnes and Adams, *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*, 23.

¹⁷ Mark Regnerus, David Gordon, and Joseph Price, “Documenting Pornography Use in America: A Comparative Analysis of Methodological Approaches,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 53, no. 7 (2015): 873–881.

Even within the church, pornography usage statistics are roughly the same as outside the church. Studies have repeatedly shown that religiosity of any kind does not have an impact on the amount of pornography usage.¹⁸ While there is evidence that conservative denominations are less likely to view porn intentionally, the overall pornography usage is remarkably similar to their more liberal and secular neighbors. Frequency of prayer, church attendance, or daily Bible reading had almost no statistical impact on the amount of pornography use.¹⁹ Perhaps the most shocking statistic of all is that 15% of pastors surveyed in Protestant denominations would clinically qualify as sexual addicts, with many more pastors viewing porn on a regular basis.²⁰

Furthermore, pornography use and addiction are not just widespread, but also have detrimental effects on both individual users and their communities. The effects are wide ranging and include measurable impacts on physiology, psychology, spirituality, and social dynamics. The widespread use, comprehensive effects, and benign reputation of pornography mean that an analysis of modern research that points to the hope of the Gospel for freedom from pornography is clearly needed in modern culture.

Chapter 3: Effects of Pornography

Physiological

Before the effects of pornography, recovery from pornography addiction (and the resulting apologetic) can be outlined and discussed, the way of descent into addiction and the role of the brain must first be explored. Human sexual choices have been viewed in many ways

¹⁸ Chisholm and Gall, *Shame and the X-Rated Addiction*, 262.

¹⁹ Samuel L. Perry, “Not Practicing What You Preach: Religion and Incongruence Between Pornography Beliefs and Usage,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 55, no. 3 (2017): 374–375.

²⁰ Carnes and Adams, *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*, 337.

by various groups and societies over the years. Many people fall into one of two broad categories when it comes to views of pornography use and other sexual behaviors.

The first group is those who view pornography use as primarily a moral choice. This group is often more socially conservative and views sexual behaviors, including pornography use, as either morally good or bad. If someone within the community is participating in “bad” sexual behavior, then the prescribed solution is to simply choose to stop. The idea is that the wayward community member can choose to either view or not view pornography as simply as choosing what outfit to wear. The second group views pornography use as a personal choice with little to no moral significance. It is viewed as a way to release sexual tension in a harmless and convenient way. Both of these views fail to consider the massive impact that pornography use has on the brain of the viewer.

The brain is incredibly powerful and adaptable, and it has many mechanisms that assist humanity in reinforcing behaviors that keep them alive and healthy. For example, when a husband and wife engage in intercourse, the brain reacts in a way that reinforces the behavior to bond the couple and produce a “I feel good” response.

During a sexual experience, the hypothalamus and pituitary gland release peptide and polypeptide analgesic neurotransmitters called endorphins and enkephalins.²¹ These neurotransmitters connect to the opiate receptors in the brain and produce an extreme sense of “I feel good” that is more powerful than synthetic opiates. This reaction in the limbic system is designed to reinforce beneficial behavior so that it is repeated. For example, when a husband and wife have intercourse, the brain releases the neurotransmitters that reinforce the behavior

²¹ Doug Weiss, Ted Roberts, and Timothy Jennings, “Conquer Series Episode 3: The Battle of the Brain,” Directed by Jeremy Wiles. Kingdom Works Studios, 2013. Accessed 2022.

because of its positive reproductive and social bonding benefits. The brain also releases a pituitary neuropeptide, predominately oxytocin in women and vasopressin in men, that causes an emotional bond to form between the married couple that helps to encourage a lifelong relationship that is beneficial for the health and well-being of the couple, their children, and society.²²

Similarly, oxytocin is also released during and immediately after childbirth because it causes the woman to forget the excruciating pain of the birthing process and emotionally bond to the child. In short, these neurochemicals help to relieve pain, physical or emotional, like a naturally occurring morphine. The brain also releases dopamine, which additionally produces the “I feel good” response but in a different way.

Dopamine is released as part of the brain’s reward system.²³ While endorphins are released in response to orgasm, dopamine is released in anticipation of getting a reward (orgasm in the case of pornography addicts), during the consummation of receiving a reward, and after the reward has been obtained. This neurochemical process was designed to reinforce behavior that helps humans obtain the necessities of life, like food, shelter, and companionship, but in a pornography addict, the system has been trained to seek out sexual gratification with fantasy partners.

The limbic system does not know the difference between a loving couple, a causal sexual experience, or pornography. It functions the same way every time an individual has a sexual experience, which is how a pornography addiction develops. When an unaddicted individual

²² Danielle A Baribeau and Evdokia Anagnostou, “Oxytocin and Vasopressin: Linking Pituitary Neuropeptides and Their Receptors to Social Neurocircuits,” *Frontiers in Neuroscience* 9, no. 335 (September 2015): 2.

²³ Michael Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction* (North Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 65.

views pornography and masturbates, the brain goes through the same steps of releasing the natural opiates and bonding hormones, but instead of bonding to a committed partner, the brain bonds to the pornography.

In addition, pornography is not a typical sexual stimulus that the brain was designed to interact with like partnered sex. Due to the ability to self-select new and novel material from an ever-increasing online catalogue of videos that can be viewed at almost any time via smart phone, laptop, or tablet, pornography is considered a supernormal stimulus which creates a supernormal arousal response in the limbic system. The user is flooded with an abnormal amount of dopamine that overloads the brain's receptors. This causes the brain to disable some of its dopamine receptors so that it is less likely to be overloaded in the future.

This process, called down regulation, means that it takes more novel and risky stimuli to induce a similar "good feeling."²⁴ Repeated exposure to internet pornography also induces the brain to over express a protein called Δ FosB. Δ FosB is a key driver in neuroplastic change. The over-expression of this protein causes the addicts limbic system to be hyper-sensitized to the associated stimuli.²⁵

For the internet pornography addict, this produces an intense "wanting" that leads to compulsive sexual behavior. This hyper-sensitized limbic system is what drives a pornography addict to seek out more and more extreme or intense material to obtain arousal the longer the addiction persists. Sexual addiction is similar to many other behavioral addictions in that the first time (or even the first few times) that the addict chooses to go and look at pornography and

²⁴ Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 67.

²⁵ Brian Park et al., "Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions? A Review with Clinical Reports," *Behavioral Sciences* 6, no. 3 (May 2016): 9

masturbate, it is a conscience choice. The individual has full control of whether they will seek out or continue to view pornography. However, once the brain realizes that it can obtain an abnormally high dopamine hit from viewing pornography and masturbating, the brain will start to release the dopamine in response to external stimuli associated with the sexual behavior. This produces an intense desire within the individual to perform the associated behavior. In the end, the individual needs the behavior to feel any pleasure, mitigate any pain, or just to feel normal.²⁶ This effect is worse the earlier in life the addict was exposed to pornographic material.²⁷

Often, this first exposure is between the ages of eleven and thirteen. A 2013 survey of sex addicts (conducted by Paula Hall) found that 41% of them had started using pornography before the age of twelve.²⁸ When an adolescent brain is exposed to pornographic material, the area of the brain that controls decision making, the prefrontal cortex, is not yet fully developed.

Once this initial exposure to pornography happens, then the brain's limbic system, which is fully developed by the age of six, begins to release powerful neurochemicals. These neurochemicals develop habit forming neural pathways that make the behavior easier to perform via muscle memory rather than conscience choice. This process is especially strong in adolescents whose prefrontal cortex is not fully developed. In short, the adolescent develops a compulsive sexual addiction before their brain is developed enough to understand the full moral, emotional, psychological, and physiological impact.

²⁶ Paula Hall, *Sex Addiction: A Guide for Couples and Those Who Help Them*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2019, 22.

²⁸ Paula Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction: A Comprehensive Guide for People Who Struggle with Sex Addiction and Those Who Want to Help Them* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2019), 38.

The damage done to the physical structure of the brain becomes obvious when imaged by a SPECT scan.²⁹ The images from a sex addict's brain show decreased blood flow to the prefrontal cortex and other areas of the brain, as compared to someone who does not engage in compulsive pornography use. Decreased blood flow to the prefrontal cortex is linked with a more limited ability to make rational decisions. This is a similar result to SPECT imaging conducted on people with a history of illicit drug use.

In addition to the detrimental neurological impact on the structure and function of the brain mentioned in the previous section, many pornography addicts suffer from limited sexual arousal and erectile dysfunction (ED).³⁰ A significant cross-sectional study conducted in 1999 reported that 5% of men ages 18–59 struggled with ED and only 2% reported ED under the age of forty.³¹ More recent data has shown a significant shift in reported levels of ED in sexually active men between the ages of eighteen and forty. A 2011 study conducted in Europe demonstrated a range of 14%–28% of sexually active men under forty reporting ED problems. A 2014 study of Canadian adolescents between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one showed that 26% of the respondents reported having erectile dysfunction. A 2014 cross-sectional study of active-duty male military personnel, who were otherwise healthy, reported that 33.2% of the respondents reported erectile dysfunction and 15.7% reported erectile dysfunction that had not been diagnosed with PTSD.³²

²⁹ Doug Weiss, Ted Roberts, and Timothy Jennings, “Conquer Series Episode 4: Renewing the Mind,” Directed by Jeremy Wiles. Kingdom Works Studios, 2013. Accessed 2022

³⁰ Brian Park et al., “Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions?” 17.

³¹ Brian Park et al., “Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions?” 1.

³² Brian Park et al., “Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions?” 2.

In addition to ED, many of these studies reported that participants also reported low desires for sex, difficulty achieving orgasm, and relational difficulties with their spouse or partner related to ED and low sexual desire.³³ Researchers also noted that levels of ED and other sexual disorders may be under reported due to the sense of social shame associated with sexual dysfunction. This is demonstrated by only 1.67% of those affected by ED seeking medication to help mitigate the issue.³⁴

This significant shift in the data in just a brief ten-year period has many contributing factors but, according to Park et al., the introduction of the first porn “tube-site” in 2006 was pivotal. Previously, highly stimulating video pornography could only be obtained by visiting adult stores, movie theaters, or by downloading videos off the internet. “Tube-sites” made it possible to view pornography without running the risk of exposure to societal stigma associated with visiting adult movie theaters or incurring internet viruses by allowing visitors to view pornography from the privacy of their homes without having to create accounts or download the videos onto their computers.

The link between increasing levels of sexual dysfunction and pornography is further supported by a hyperactive response to internet pornography mentioned in the previous section that cause addicts to seek out more novel and intense material, but a hypoactive response towards partnered sex. It is possible that the overexpression of the neurochemicals in response to the supernormal arousal stimulated by pornography leaves the more normal arousal provided by partnered sex unable to induce the brain to release the necessary neurochemicals to maintain

³³ Brian Park et al., “Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions?” 2.

³⁴ Brian Park et al., “Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions?” 2.

erection or achieve orgasm.³⁵ The correlation between ED and pornography exposure is also strengthened by case studies that demonstrate abstinence from pornography produces a lessening of sexual disorders including low libido for partner sex and ED.

Psychological

Similar to many other addicts, those who have pornography addictions suffer from a plethora of psychological effects. They include intense sense of shame, poor emotional coping skills, mood swings, anxiety, depression, and an inability to empathize with others. To fully understand the negative effects of pornography use, one must first understand the addiction cycle.

In most (if not all) cases, pornography addiction is not about sexual appetite but more about escaping from reality or dealing with pain and stress.³⁶ This often originates in childhood as people learn to cope with negative emotions and seek positive emotional experiences. Every human will use certain behaviors or substances to cope with negative emotions or seek pleasing emotional experiences. Whether it is work, exercising, hobbies, food, alcohol, music, or sex, people will use these activities or substances to manipulate their emotional state. Most people also have a tendency to overindulge in these areas, but the negative effects of overindulgence often act as a check on continuing to pursue the activity or substance to the extent that an addict does.

Surveys of pornography addicts indicate that they often failed to develop an ability to cope with negative emotions in healthy and moderate ways. The majority of addicts surveyed (60%) stated that they came from controlling households where there were limited opportunities

³⁵ Brian Park et al., "Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions?" 12.

³⁶ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 7.

to develop healthy decision-making skills and self-discipline. Another 26% came from households with almost no regulation at all that left the child to explore behaviors and substances without education or guidance from a more experienced adult.³⁷ These households also often had unhealthy emotional expression habits that were taught and perpetuated—with either the enforcement of only approved emotional expression and no tolerance for negative emotions, or the overexpression of emotions to a dangerous or frightening level. These two different extremes both produce fertile ground in children to develop poor abilities to cope with negative emotions such as anger, loneliness, or boredom.

The pornography addict, unlike the others with different backgrounds, begins to numb negative emotions with online sexual experiences instead of learning how to healthily express and process the emotions. Then, the behavior itself becomes problematic as the addict experiences negative emotions because of their pornography use. By this time, the only way that the brain knows how to deal with the negative emotions brought about by the pornography use is to go and use more pornography.³⁸ This cycle has been broken into six steps and, with some variation, is used by a broad range of addiction researchers and counselors.

Phase 1 Dormant

The dormant phase is characterized by a lack of triggers to engage in watching pornography. During this phase, everything can seem relatively normal although the addict may utilize other coping behaviors to deal with stress and pain during this time. The addict may also still exhibit other characteristics of pornography addiction such as habitual lying, moodiness, and lack of self-control. This phase is often short lived but can last for days, weeks, months, or even

³⁷ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 37.

³⁸ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 11.

years in some addicts. The underlying causes of the addiction have not been dealt with and eventually something will trigger the addict.³⁹

Phase 2 Triggers

Triggers can be a variety of different stimuli including exposure to certain situations or people that produce negative emotions, increased desire for attention and affirmation, or simply ample opportunity to indulge in pornography.⁴⁰ Almost anything can be a trigger for someone with a pornography addiction. Patrick Carnes, the father of modern sex addiction research, states, Sexual addicts are hostages of their own preoccupation. Every passerby, every relationship, and every introduction to someone passes through the sexually obsessive filter. More than merely noticing sexually attractive people, there is a quality of desperation that interferes with work, relaxation, and even sleep. People become objects to be scrutinized. A walk through a crowded downtown area is translated into a veritable shopping list of ‘possibilities.’⁴¹

Phase 3 Preparation

In this phase, the addict makes all the arrangements needed to indulge in pornography. This can include practical arrangements like being alone, surfing the internet, or flipping through TV channels that the addict knows will contain pornographic images and the psychological arrangements like providing justifications for being alone, making vows to themselves that they will not view pornography again, or maintaining denial structures that convince the addict that they are not preparing to view pornography and masturbate.

Paula Hall has identified a thought pattern that is common to humanity but over expressed in pornography addicts, which is called cognitive distortions. Cognitive distortions are patterns of thinking, consciously or subconsciously, that justify why the addict can do something

³⁹ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 52.

⁴⁰ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 52–53.

⁴¹ Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows* (Center City: Hazelden Information & Edu, 2001), Ch 1: The Addiction Cycle.

they know is immoral, unhealthy physically, illegal, or damaging to their work or social relationships.⁴² Addicts who had just vowed not to view pornography ever again will begin to create elaborate justifications on why it is acceptable to take each step in the preparation phase. They will even deny to themselves that they are preparing to act out all the way up to the point where they finally masturbate.

It is important to note that the preparation phase, called ritualization by Carnes, is just as much a part of the addiction as is viewing pornography and masturbating. The preparation to act out is already numbing their emotional pain and riding the “bubble” of arousal.⁴³ This phase can last minutes, hours, or even weeks and months depending on the addict’s pattern.

Phase 4 Acting Out

Acting out is the culmination of all the addict’s work during the preparation phase since they experienced a trigger. For the pornography addict, it is often masturbation and orgasm. As previously mentioned, the sexual experience itself is only a means to an end. While addicts certainly enjoy what they do, at first anyway, the emotionally numbing effect is the true end result that the addict seeks. Acting out produces the physical and psychological result of numbing negative emotions.⁴⁴

Phase 5 Regret

The regret phase can vary in length and intensity depending on the cognitive distortions used by the addict and the immediate consequences of the addict’s acting out. The regret phase can range from little to no remorse about their actions to an intense abiding sense of shame and

⁴² Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 54.

⁴³ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 54.

⁴⁴ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 55–56.

despair. Patrick Carnes named this stage of the addiction cycle, “despair,” in his version because of how many people experience deep shame because of their sexual compulsivity.⁴⁵ Paula Hall states that the individual’s reaction to acting out depends on the immediate consequences of acting out and the cognitive distortions they have in place.⁴⁶ The immediate consequences have an obvious impact on the addict.

The feeling of shame and regret will be intensified if they were caught by an angry spouse, spent money that they needed for bills on it, or were reprimanded at work for not being productive because they were surfing for pornography on the internet. Less obvious, but more commonly, the regret phase is fueled by the addict’s own thought patterns. The shame of living a double life, being powerless to stop acting out, or failure to live up to previous oaths to never act out again.

This shame can be deepened further if the addict’s viewing of pornography directly contradicts their core values. Like other phases of addiction, the regret phase can last minutes, weeks, or months depending on the addict’s ability to reconstitute themselves. If the addiction does contradict the addict’s core values, then the shame can be so powerful that the addict reverts directly back into the preparation phase to numb the pain.

Phase 6 Reconstitution

The reconstitution phase involves the addict cleaning up and reordering their lives again.⁴⁷ This can involve deleting browsing history, taking care of physical needs (if the addict has not eaten or slept), making vows to never act out again, or ensuring that there is no trail that

⁴⁵ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, Ch 1: The Addiction Cycle.

⁴⁶ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 57.

⁴⁷ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 58.

can be discovered by a spouse or co-worker. The reconstitution phase brings the addict back to “normal,” but it is the pretend normal of the dormant phase not the true normal of a nonaddict. The addict will often still struggle with intense shame, depression, and anxiety during this phase. The underlying causes of addiction have still not been addressed, and the addict is still in the addiction cycle waiting for the next trigger to set off those underlying issues.

This brief explanation into the addiction cycle aptly demonstrates the psychological effect of compulsive pornography use. The first, and most common, psychological effect is a deep sense of shame. Shame can be the catalyst and the fuel to continue the addiction cycle. Every time the addict goes through the addiction cycle, it deepens the shame that can lead to depression and suicidal thoughts.⁴⁸ Shame can be defined as “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging.”⁴⁹ Shame often leads to the other psychological effects of pornography addiction and shame reduction is key to helping an addict recover.⁵⁰

As the addict continuously goes through the addiction cycle, the shame intensifies and leads to ever increasing isolation—both isolation from their family and friends as they spend more and more time pursuing pornography, and isolation from themselves as they increasingly rely on cognitive distortions to mitigate the emotional pain of being unable to stop their addiction. The stress of living a double life also increases the addict’s anxiety. This is especially true if the addict is seeking to conceal their behavior from a spouse, children, employer, coworkers, or other friends and family.

⁴⁸ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, Ch 1: The Addiction Cycle.

⁴⁹ Brené Brown, “Shame Resilience Theory: A Grounded Theory Study on Women and Shame,” *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 87, no. 1 (2006): 45.

⁵⁰ Carnes and Adams, *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*, 130.

Unfortunately, all these negative psychological states begin to merge with the compulsive sexual behavior and can then not only be the result of acting out but can also be triggers for starting the addiction cycle over again.⁵¹ For example, an addict who seeks to be alone to view pornography and masturbate will begin to be triggered to compulsively view pornography anytime they are alone. The isolation is now the preparation to view pornography as well as the trigger to act out sexually. Carnes has noted that many addicts will eventually reach a point of unmanageability⁵²—where the public life and private compulsive behavior can no longer be kept secret. This is when the addict suffers separation from a spouse who caught them again or when an addict is fired because they spent countless work hours perusing pornography. They eventually only have one life because there is no longer a spouse, friends, family, or employer to hide their addiction from.

Social

The social relationship most often and most deeply affected by the disclosure or discovery of a pornography addiction is the spouse. Upon discovering a pornography addiction, the spouse is thrown into a whirlwind of emotions. Their trusted and deeply loved spouse has been revealed to be a liar and a sexual addict. Trust is immediately shattered and the double life their partner has been living leaves them always asking, “What else was a lie?”⁵³

The emotional reactions can range from complete numbness, to blind rage, to devastated depression. Often, the spouse will experience a roller coaster of emotions as they attempt to reorient themselves in a new reality. The psychological impact on the betrayed spouse is a form

⁵¹ Carnes and Adams, *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*, 130–131.

⁵² Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, Ch 1: The Addiction Cycle.

⁵³ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 62–63.

of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and comes with many of the symptoms familiar to natural disaster survivors and combat veterans.⁵⁴

In addition to extreme hypo- and hyper- emotional states, the spouse may have nightmares while sleeping and unwanted thoughts about the betrayal while awake. Environmental triggers can cause the spouse to relive the grief and shame of the initial moment of discovery as if it was happening all over again. This process can become more difficult and painful if the partner was involved in particularly repugnant activities or viewing certain genres of pornography.

The long road to recovery for the spouse is beyond the scope of this paper. It is sufficient to point out that the addict's actions will either cause the spouse to abandon the relationship or struggle through the difficult recovery process to repair the damaged relationship. Either way, the addict's relationship with their spouse is irrevocably different than it was before, which will have a tremendous social impact on the addict. If the addict has any children, the ripple effect of their actions will impact the children as well. The depth and intensity of the impact will depend on the specifics of the addict's addiction and the age of the children.

Older children may go through a similar process as the spouse.⁵⁵ They may experience feelings of disbelief, grief, shame, or anger. Trust is also shattered and will take years to rebuild. Younger children will still suffer from the tension and emotional stress present in the home and parents who are struggling with addiction or betrayal trauma may unintentionally neglect the needs of their children.⁵⁶ Children are very egocentric and will experience their parent's tension

⁵⁴ Carnes and Adams, *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*, 130–131.

⁵⁵ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 135.

⁵⁶ Carnes and Adams, *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*, 130–131.

and neglect as rejection of the child. Children may internalize this rejection as an overall feeling of worthlessness or unlovability. Just as with the spouse, the addict's compulsive behavior will result in destruction of the family cohesion and increase anxiety, anger, depression, and shame in most, if not all, of the members of their immediate family.

Spiritual

Although not as thoroughly researched as other results of pornography addiction, there is a clear spiritual impact of compulsive pornography use. Here, a distinction must be drawn between religion and spirituality. Organized religion is a community of believers who believe and practice according to similar traditions. This is different from spirituality, which has been defined by Patrick Carnes as “an integrated cognitive, affective, behavioral, inter-personal and visceral embodied experience. It is a vision of what the addict's life can be once he is freed from his addiction.”⁵⁷ Or, from a specifically Christian perspective, spirituality is, “to love God... to be alive to him... to be in communion with him, in this present moment of history. And... to love men, to be alive to men as men, and to be in communication on a true personal level with men, in this present moment of history.”⁵⁸ Both religious practice and spirituality can be adversely affected by compulsive pornography use.

Regarding religion, a pornography addict will experience deep shame over their actions and that sense of shame will be amplified if it contradicts strongly held religious beliefs. It can also give an intense feeling of being a hypocrite especially if the addict holds a leadership position within their faith community.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Carnes and Adams, *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*, 204.

⁵⁸ Francis Schaeffer. *True Spirituality*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 42

⁵⁹ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 94.

All these psychological effects can lead to increasing isolation from practicing their religion, and from participating in religious community. This often results in the addict feeling disconnected from their God. The other option is that the addict increases their spiritual practices to “make up” for their compulsive sexual behavior, which can also lead to intensifying feelings of shame and hypocrisy, and a deepening of the cognitive distortions that separate the addict further from reality. Equally devastating is the impact to the individual’s sense of spirituality or spiritual connection. Carnes’ definition of spirituality positively correlated the addict’s level of spirituality and their level of hope. It is not at all surprising that a 2014 study indicated that individuals believed that their compulsive pornography use directly interfered or disrupted their relationship with God.⁶⁰

Chapter4: Causes of Pornography Addiction

One major point of confusion among the general public, and many addicts, is how pornography addiction starts. Many people, addicts included, think that pornography addiction starts because they had a strong sex drive that could not be satisfied often enough with partner sex, and simple masturbation was not stimulating enough. However, further investigation often shows these assumptions to be mistaken.⁶¹

Previous sections have discussed that the roots of pornography addiction lie in a desire to numb negative feelings or to increase positive emotions, and that addicts usually report their first exposure to pornography at or even before puberty. This implies that the cause of the addiction must lie in the adolescence or childhood of the addict.⁶² Clinical researcher Paula Hall has

⁶⁰ Chisholm and Gall, “Shame and the X-Rated Addiction,” 263.

⁶¹ Paula Hall, *Sex Addiction: A Guide for Couples and Those Who Help Them* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2019), 24.

⁶² Hall, *Sex*, 24.

identified three roots of pornography addiction. Pornography addiction can be opportunity-induced, attachment-induced, or trauma-induced.⁶³ It may also be some combination of the three roots.

Opportunity-Induced

The previous History of Pornography in America and Prevalence of Pornography sections highlighted how humans have always been interested in sex and pleasure. They also noted how widely accessible sexual content is to anyone who has access to a computer, tablet, or laptop. In fact, the ubiquity of sexual content on the internet and in media in general make it a case of when, not if, a child will be exposed to sexually explicit material before they are old enough to process what they see. This means that all addicts have at least some degree of opportunity involved in their exposure to and subsequent addiction to pornography. Even if a history of trauma or attachment issues are the primary driver of their compulsive behavior, without opportunity, the addict would not have developed a specifically sexual addiction.

A survey of 619 sex addicts demonstrates the power and prevalence of opportunity in developing an addiction when 38% of those surveyed self-reported that their addiction was primarily opportunity induced.⁶⁴ Many of these individuals were simply exploring their budding sexuality as adolescents without knowing that their actions could form an addiction. The fact that pornography acts as a supernormal stimulus to the brain's reward center means that repeated habitual exposure has the potential to create addictive neural pathways in the brain without the added element of trauma or attachment disorders.⁶⁵

⁶³ Hall, *Sex*, 26.

⁶⁴ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 36.

⁶⁵ Thaddeus Birchard and Joanna Benfield, *Routledge International Handbook of Sexual Addiction* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 114.

Some researchers have classified pornography as a rapid onset disorder that is characterized by the three Cs: chronicity, content, and culture. The constant exposure (chronicity) triggers the brain's neuroplastic processes which is exacerbated by the supernormal stimulus of modern pornography (content). The final C (culture) refers to the overtly sexual nature of modern western culture. It is unlikely for an individual go through an entire day without encountering sexually explicit material on movies, television, advertisements, or the internet.⁶⁶ However, if pornography is so available and so many are exposed to sexually explicit material at younger and younger ages, then why is it that only some individuals become addicted while others do not. Paula Hall has identified five contributing factors that lead some young people to develop a pornography addiction.

The first is an underdeveloped ability to make decisions based on wisdom and sound judgment, or a lack of self-control. Children begin to learn to make decisions early, but addicts fail to develop these necessary skills to a healthy level. This is largely due to the family of origin. Most addicts surveyed by Paula Hall (60%) reported that they had homes with strict rules that never allowed them to learn to make decisions on their own.⁶⁷ In these homes, the parent was the absolute authority, and all decisions were made by them. This rigid environment did not leave the child any room to develop their self-discipline because the parents' will was so dominant. The other type of home that many (26%) addicts come from is a home with no rules at all.⁶⁸ The children in these homes are forced to make many decisions themselves with little to no guidance

⁶⁶ Birchard and Benfield, *Routledge International Handbook of Sexual Addiction*, 115.

⁶⁷ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 36.

⁶⁸ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 37.

from older and wiser counselors. Therefore, the child does not develop the self-discipline needed to control their impulses.

Another lesson that the parents of addicts often fail to teach their children is how to manage their feelings. These homes failed to provide the child with a healthy role model for emotional expression. The home often had a habit of not tolerating any emotional express at all or emotional expression that was expressed without control.⁶⁹ The latter example leaves the child with the impression that emotions are dangerous and frightening. Either one of these examples will leave a developing child without an example of how to manage negative feelings. These negative feelings are then numbed with sexual activity. Pornography, in particular, is so effective at soothing negative emotions that an addict may be under the impression that they never have negative emotions.

Another characteristic of an addict's childhood home is the presence of secrets and shame as a normal part of family life. Many addicts can recall that their family had a culture of secrets. Often, the family had a well-polished and put together exterior that hid abuse, addiction, adoption, adultery, or some other hidden vice.⁷⁰ Other addicts report more personal secrets like their own thoughts and feelings about life circumstances.

The presence and power of secrets in an addict's past is common enough that it is included as an important recovery question in some 12-Step Programs like Celebrate Recovery.⁷¹ The addict learned to keep secrets and maintain a façade as a child and these skills are carried

⁶⁹ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 37.

⁷⁰ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 37.

⁷¹ John Baker, *Stepping Out of Denial into God's Grace: Participant's Guide, 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 20.

into adulthood as a “normal” part of life. The practice of keeping secrets also acts as a breeding ground for shame. The shame may be a product of keeping the secret or it may have been weaponized by the parents as a tool to control the young addict. Punishments may have been designed to make the young addict feel that they are intrinsically worthless and may have involved verbal abuse.⁷²

What the addict’s home taught about sex is also seems to be a vital factor in whether the child exposed to pornography will develop an addiction. Again, the extremes seem to be particularly damaging. Many addict’s homes taught that sex, if it was discussed at all, was shameful, sinful, or perverted. A survey conducted by Hall reported that 41% of addict’s came from a home that a negative view of sex or completely ignored it.⁷³ The other extreme is households that taught that sex was to be explored without consideration of the physical and emotional consequences. Both of these are damaging and, when combined with an earlier exposure to pornography, turn to addiction.

The final characteristic of an addict’s adolescent development is an overwhelming sense of loneliness. For all people, adolescence is a time of identity development as young people interact with their peers and attempt to find a place where they “fit.” A survey conducted by Hall discovered that 64% of addicts admitted that they often felt isolated as children and 20% identified isolation and loneliness as the main factor contributing to their addiction.⁷⁴

Attachment-Induced

⁷² Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 38.

⁷³ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 38.

⁷⁴ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 39.

Attachment begins developing almost immediately as a newborn begins to register and internalize how consistently and accurately their primary caregiver, usually a parent, responds to their needs.⁷⁵ The child will develop models for what to expect from others based on this early interaction with their primary caregiver. Children who develop a secure and healthy attachment had parents who were supportive and well attuned to their emotional needs. These children were allowed to explore, make mistakes, and learn from them. If these children experienced any trauma, it was often mitigated or healed by the attentive and attuned parents.⁷⁶

Conversely, if there is abuse, abandonment, neglect, or inadequate parenting, then a disordered attachment style will develop. “Inadequate parenting” is defined by Hall as a “childhood situation where parents were unavailable or unresponsive due to extenuating circumstances—for example, physical or emotional illness of themselves or another child, parental separation or divorce, victim of domestic violence, extreme poverty or simply because of naivety.”⁷⁷ Inadequate parenting is difficult to pinpoint, and it is important to note that the parents are not to blame and most likely were doing the best they could with the resources that they had. Healthy attachment may also fail to develop if the child is physically separated from a parent due to adoption, fostering, or death.

The fact that sex addiction is often classified as an intimacy or attachment disorder demonstrates just how prevalent attachment induced sexual addiction is.⁷⁸ Many addicts came

⁷⁵ Thaddeus Birchard and Joanna Benfield, *Routledge International Handbook of Sexual Addiction* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 108.

⁷⁶ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 45.

⁷⁷ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 46.

⁷⁸ Thaddeus Birchard and Joanna Benfield, *Routledge International Handbook of Sexual Addiction* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 108.

from homes that failed to teach them healthy attachment patterns. A study conducted by Patrick Carnes in 1983 found that 78% of sex addicts came from rigid family structures that were characterized by a myriad of rules and little to no emotional intimacy or attunement to emotional needs.⁷⁹ The addict then develops an unhealthy attachment style that leaves them without the tools to develop close and intimate relationships with spouses, friends or children. One recent study from 2008 found that 92% of sex addicts that were surveyed had an unhealthy attachment style.⁸⁰ When these individuals experience emotional distress due to negative interactions with spouses or other close relationships, the addict turns to one of the earliest coping mechanisms they developed.

Trauma-Induced

Trauma comes in a variety of forms and intensities. There are two different broad categories of trauma that are important to addiction studies. Big-T traumas are the type of trauma that probably comes to mind when the word trauma is mentioned. These types of traumas can be one single major event or may occur regularly over the course of many years and are often obvious and easy to identify.

Big-T traumas can include everything from violent assaults, abuse, bereavement, abandonment, or major illnesses. Little-t traumas are more subtle and more difficult to identify. The individual experiencing little-t traumas may not even realize they are experiencing a traumatic event, but they are no less damaging to an individual's psychological well-being. They are also far more common than their big-T counterparts.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, Ch 1: The Addiction Cycle

⁸⁰ Birchard and Benfield, *Routledge International Handbook of Sexual Addiction*, 108.

⁸¹ Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 15.

Little-t traumas can include, but are not limited to: lack of attunement, lack of emotional connection, made to not feel good enough, controlled by another's anger, or prevented from pursuing their dreams or the loss of a dream. Although little-t and big-T traumas have outward differences, they all completely overwhelm the ability to process incoming information, both at the time of the experience, and in similar future situations.⁸² While not everyone who experiences trauma becomes an addict, there are few addicts who have not experienced some form of trauma, especially early in their development.

All forms of trauma cause physical and psychological damage to the victim. Physically, trauma directly damages the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS). A brief explanation of the ANS and how trauma impacts this vital system will explain its relevance to addiction formation. The ANS is responsible for, among other things, defending the individual from threats. The ANS performs this function through three distinct responses depending on the context and intensity of the threat being experienced.

The threat response is divided into three parts: the sympathetic (associated with the fight or flight reaction), and the parasympathetic (which has two different reactions depending on circumstances). The parasympathetic portion of the nervous system is dominated by the vagal nerve that can either produce a calm and socially engaged reaction to a threat or a freeze and collapse reaction. The freeze or collapse reaction is associated with the dorsal (behind) vagal nerve, and the ventral (front) vagal nerve is associated with the ability to react to social cues and a calm response.⁸³

⁸² Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 14.

⁸³ Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 73.

When these threat responses are functioning correctly, they will engage to protect the individual from a sufficiently large threat, and then the individual will return to operating from their ventral vagal nerve and engage with the world with calmness and using social engagement tools. The ventral vagal response keeps the fight, flight, freeze/collapse responses in check and allows the prefrontal cortex to function with clear perception and calm.⁸⁴

For example, an individual who encounters an angry mother bear on a remote trail will first have their sympathetic nervous system engaged, and they will either fight or flee depending on the circumstances. If the threat posed by the angry mother bear could not be solved by either fighting or fleeing, then the parasympathetic system will take over and cause the individual to submit or play dead and if the threat is perceived to be large enough, the brain will trigger a complete shutdown through fainting or passing out.⁸⁵

However, the damage caused by trauma can create a situation where an individual is operating from their sympathetic or parasympathetic threat responses continuously. Practically speaking, this means that some individuals who have experienced trauma, especially early childhood trauma, are constantly having their brains hijacked by the predominantly unconsciously acting ANS.⁸⁶ When presented with a threat, either real or perceived, the individual will leave their ability to be calm and rational behind and react with a variety of reactions. They may angrily lash out (fight response), get in their car and abandon their responsibilities (flight), or become numb and catatonic (freeze/collapse). The individual with a traumatized ANS may react in seemingly extreme ways to slight provocations. These negative

⁸⁴ Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 75.

⁸⁵ Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 75.

⁸⁶ Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 80.

emotions trigger another automatic response in the limbic system that causes the brain to deeply desire to numb the pain with whatever learned behavior has successfully soothed the pain in the past.

In the case of pornography addicts, it causes them to seek sexually explicit images and masturbation. This can take on a variety of forms. For example, a man who lived with a highly perfectionistic and critical mother who tended to verbally and emotionally abuse him may have coped with the trauma by submitting to his domineering mother and secretly soothing his emotions via masturbation and eventually through pornography and masturbation. After he marries, his damaged ANS may become triggered at the slightest criticism from his wife. No matter how encouraging the wife may be, the brain will likely respond with signals to self-soothe via pornography and masturbation in the same way it was trained to when the addict was a boy.

Although trauma-based pornography addiction is often perpetuated by unconscious systems in the brain, the addict is completely responsible for their actions. They may not be responsible for their addiction, but they are responsible for their own actions. Much like an alcoholic who kills a pedestrian in a drunken accident is responsible for the death of the pedestrian, the pornography addict is responsible for their adultery, wasted time, wasted money, broken trust, broken families, and so on.

Chapter 5: Biblical Sexuality

In order to build a full apologetic for the Gospel from pornography addiction and recovery, the biblical origin and purpose of sexuality must first be explained. The biblical sexual ethic is first rooted in what the Bible teaches about the origins of humanity. That all people—both men and women—were made in God's image from the beginning (Gen. 1:27). This tradition is profoundly different from other religions and cultures.

In the Atra-Hasis of Mesopotamia, humanity is described as created by the gods as an afterthought to do the work that the gods did not want to do.⁸⁷ Aristotle stated that only free Greek men were capable of full reasoning capabilities, and that women and slaves were meant to be ruled over by nature.⁸⁸ Conversely, the Judeo-Christian scripture states that people's worth was not based on the status of their birth or the amount of wealth or military might they could command, but on the fact that they bore the image of their Creator, God. Bearing God's image meant that all humanity was, in some ways, like God and represented him.⁸⁹ This applied equally to men and women.

Women were not less worthy than men, and one people group did not bear God's image more than another but were equal in worth and dignity.⁹⁰ This means that no human has the right to treat another person with less dignity than is due to an image bearer of God. This is directly referenced in Genesis 9:6 when the Bible teaches that no human can take the life of another because they are made in God's image.

Also, the Bible teaches that the creation of humanity into both male and female, instead of just one generic human, is another way that the image of God is reflected in humankind. God is an interpersonal unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and humanity is also created to achieve a type of interpersonal unity between one man and one woman through marriage.⁹¹ The bond

⁸⁷ Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of The Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 83.

⁸⁸ Marguerite Deslauriers, *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 44.

⁸⁹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine 2nd Ed.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 567.

⁹⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 580.

⁹¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 580.

between man and woman in marriage is physical, emotional, and spiritual. The Bible teaches that sexual union between husband and wife is so profound and binding that it is described as becoming “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

In the New Testament, Jesus expounds on this line of thinking by stating that God is the one who joins the married couples together (Matt. 19:6). In summary, the Bible states that sex was created as a good gift that God gave to humanity to glorify him. Furthermore, sex’s purpose, according to the scripture, is for pleasure (Pro. 5:18–19), marital love and consummation (Gen. 2:23–24), and procreation (Gen. 1:28). This places sex as one of the most wonderful and powerful of God’s gifts to humanity.

This exalted view of sex is very different than the modern or ancient view of sexuality. Cultures influenced by platonic philosophy often saw the material world as evil and corrupted, and all the desires associated with the material world as base and unvirtuous. Sex was, therefore, seen as an unwelcome bodily desire that either needed to be completely removed or needed to be quickly “released” so as to purge the body of the unvirtuous lust.⁹²

Unfortunately, many of the church fathers were heavily influenced by Neoplatonism and other forms of ascetic philosophy that emphasized the celibate life as the most virtuous and holy life,⁹³ while the life of those who married and had sex was somehow less holy. This was not just a fringe belief but was dominant in mainstream orthodox Christian thought. Great Christian thinkers and authors like Jerome, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine of Hippo all clearly taught that sex was either less good than other bodily desires, or a direct result of the fall of man.

⁹² Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 124–125.

⁹³ Dennis P. Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 37–38.

On other end of the spectrum is the modern view, which was also held by many ancient people as well, that sexual expression is an unfettered good and should be explored without restriction. This modern sentiment is summarized succinctly by Carl Trueman when he writes,

I noted in the introduction that no one has to have seen the *40-Year-Old-Virgin* to know that it is a comedy, for the idea of a middle-aged virgin is today self-evidently comical. In our world, it speaks of someone who is somehow inadequate or who has failed to be a fully rounded and fulfilled human being. To reach forty without being sexually active is indicative of a failed life. This is the result of a culture, of a social imaginary, in which the personal sexual satisfaction in the context of sexual freedom corralled only by the notion of consent is presented as the aspirational norm for proper human selfhood.⁹⁴

Sexual expression is at the least a required prerequisite to mature adulthood, and at most a basis for an individual's identity.

Biblical Purposes of Sex

The above-mentioned origin of sex as created by God as a good gift to humanity leads into an explanation of the purpose of sex in the Christian worldview. A comprehensive study of scripture reveals that sexual morality has a structure and purpose. Most readers casually familiar with the Bible know that it contains many negative commands regarding certain sexual practices. This only makes sense in the context of the high and holy origin of sex outlined in the previous section. Contrary to popular belief, the Bible does not have a negative view of sex but an incredibly exalted view of sex. Similar to potent drugs, sex has clear purposes that must be understood if it is to be used in a healthy way.

Pleasure

One of the most obvious and most talked about purposes of sex is personal pleasure and the Bible is in full agreement with the pleasurable nature of sex. Although many otherwise orthodox Christian teachers of the past have attempted to minimize or reject the role of pleasure

⁹⁴ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 188–189.

in the biblical teaching, the Bible's celebration of the goodness of sexual pleasure within marriage are too numerous to ignore or minimize.

The Song of Solomon, among other things, is a poetic celebration of love that includes many references to the pleasure of sex. The lyrics of the poem speak for themselves:

²Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your love is better than wine;
³ your anointing oils are fragrant;
your name is oil poured out;
therefore virgins love you.
⁴Draw me after you; let us run.
The king has brought me into his chambers."⁹⁵
And again, in chapter 7,

⁶How beautiful and pleasant you are,
O loved one, with all your delights!^[a]
⁷Your stature is like a palm tree,
and your breasts are like its clusters.
⁸I say I will climb the palm tree
and lay hold of its fruit.
Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
and the scent of your breath like apples,
⁹and your mouth^[b] like the best wine."⁹⁶

Although past generations of theologians have attempted to allegorize the Song of Solomon as God's love for Israel or Christ's love for his Church, the original author's obvious celebration of sexual pleasure is difficult to deny from a plain reading of the text.⁹⁷ Another Old Testament passage that clearly reveals sexual pleasure as a purpose of sex is in the book of Proverbs.

In a passage where a father is teaching his son to avoid an adulterous woman, the father turns to extol the goodness of sex within marriage. The language used is vivid when he describes

⁹⁵ Song of Solomon 1:2–4, ESV.

⁹⁶ Song of Solomon 7:6–9.

⁹⁷ Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 90.

a wife as, “A loving doe, a graceful deer, may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love” (Pro. 5:19). This is not a simple command to only have unpassionate sex with the goal of producing children. This passage commands a young man to enjoy his wife’s body and to be intoxicated with her love.

The aforementioned passages in the Song of Solomon make it clear that good, God-pleasing sex is a passionate and pleasurable experience for husband and wife. The goodness of sexual pleasure is further supported in the writings of Paul where he affirms that pleasure is a key part of the biblical view of sex while rebuking the false teachings of Christian ascetics in the Corinthian church who were attempting to forbid marriage and the eating of certain foods.

The Apostle Paul states that sex and food are to be enjoyed as good gifts from God (1 Tim. 4:3–4). In another passage, Paul explicitly tells the Corinthian Christians to fulfill their spouse’s sexual needs, and to not practice asceticism in marriage (1 Cor. 7:3–4). The rationale he provides for this advice is so that the couple may avoid the temptation to sexual immorality outside of marriage. He even goes as far as saying that both the husband and the wife have the right to the other person’s body.

Although he does say he wishes everyone to be single, like himself, he specifically states that this would be his preference and that God did not actually give everyone the gift of celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7). Paul clearly upholds the goodness of sex within a marriage between one man and one woman, and in no way states or alludes to celibacy being a “holier” life. It is clear from scripture that pleasure is one of God’s purposes for creating sex, but there are certainly others. However, the Bible is clear that mere physical pleasure is far from the only purpose of sex or its most profound purpose.

Consummation of Marriage/Expression of Love

Another biblical purpose for sex is the expression of love and to consummate an exclusive marriage relationship. The neurochemical bonding power of sex was addressed previously in this paper, including the bonding hormones vasopressin and oxytocin. These neurotransmitters, among other neurological processes, are simply a scientific explanation of something the Bible stated emphatically for 3500 years. Early in the book of Genesis, the Bible states that a man will leave the house of his parents and be joined to his wife. They are then described as being “one-flesh” (Gen. 2:24). The bonding power of the sexual union is so strong that the Bible describes it as two separate individuals that are now considered one. They are now the first building block of a civilization.

Once the true extent of the bonding process is understood, it is clear why the Bible insists on having sex only within a marriage relationship. Sex is meant to consummate the covenant physically, what has already been promised verbally. Every time the couple has sex after the first time, it reinforces and deepens the spiritual and emotional bond. This does not destroy the individual’s unique characteristics and personhood but makes it clear that their personhood and characteristics are no longer theirs alone.⁹⁸ Another way to state this is to call it, “Love.”

Sexual intimacy’s purpose is as an expression of love so deep and intense that it gives itself entirely to another human being. Although the biblical model of love does differentiate the self-sacrificial love of God (*agape*) from the intense physical passion of sexual love (*eros*). The two loves are not contradictory but complementary.⁹⁹ The intensely physical expression of love in sexual intimacy can only find true fulfillment within the god-like, self-sacrificial love of marriage. Any attempt to separate the two will make sexual love less than what God designed it

⁹⁸ Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 83.

⁹⁹ Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 89

to be from the beginning. Ultimately, the purpose of sexual love is to lead us into the love of God. This topic will be discussed in greater detail later.

Another example of how serious the biblical teaching on the love-bond between husband and wife through sexual intimacy is the common Hebrew phrase referring to sex. In Genesis, Adam has sex with Eve and this produces their first son, Cain (Gen. 4:1), only the word used for sexual intimacy is *yada*, which means to know or have knowledge of something.¹⁰⁰ This is not a simple intellectual knowledge of another person but is deep, intimate, and experiential knowledge of another person in mind, body and soul.¹⁰¹ In fact, the “knowing” is so intimate that it produces a pregnancy that leads to the birth of another human life (Gen. 4:1). This is the next biblical purpose of sex to explore.

Procreation

Before the modern era of effective birth control measures, the most obvious purpose for sex was procreation. Early in the Bible, God clearly outlines one of the purposes for marriage, and by function, sex. He commanded Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Just as God’s internal joy and happiness within the Trinity resulted in creation, so the joy and happiness of husband and wife coming together in sexual intimacy produces children.

Sexual intimacy is not just about physical pleasure or marital intimacy but also about producing fruit that builds communities and spreads the glory of God’s image all over the

¹⁰⁰ “H3045 - Yāda’ - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (ESV),” *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3045/esv/wlc/0-1/>.

¹⁰¹ Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 83.

earth.¹⁰² ¹⁰³ Sex is never to be consumed as a commodity for its own sake. It is always meant to be fruitful and as a benefit to others. Again, the most obvious “fruit” of sex is children that the Bible describes as a blessing and a gift from God (Ps. 127:3, Ps. 128:2–4, 1 Sam. 1:19–20). However, this does not mean that couples who are infertile are unable to have fruitful sex and not all sex between husband and wife must be performed with the express purpose of producing children.

God used infertile sex between Abraham and Sarah and Elkana and Hannah to produce faith (Heb. 11:11–12, 1 Sam. 1:5–11). Paul teaches that sex can produce the fruit of a marriage relationship that glorifies him (1 Cor. 11:7) and there are numerous scriptures where sexual marriage relationships produce a household whose love and intimacy spill over in hospitality and love for others.¹⁰⁴ It is clear that fruitful sex is the biblical standard for sexual relationship and while that does mean the possibility of children it can also represent many other types of “fruit.”

Symbol of Christ and the Church

One of the most profound and interesting biblical teachings about sex is its symbolic references in scripture. Many of these references are directly speaking about marriage, but since sex and marriage are inexorably linked in the biblical tradition it is safe to draw certain conclusions from the passages. Francis Shaffer aptly stated that comparison of sex to Christ’s relationship with the Church is such an incredible leap that no human should think to make it unless God himself had made the connection first. He continues by saying that since God has in

¹⁰² Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 85.

¹⁰³ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 149.

¹⁰⁴ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 149–150.

fact made the connection, then humanity cannot afford to ignore it and must seek diligently to understand the link between sex and the Christian's relationship with Christ.¹⁰⁵

In John 3:28–29, John the Baptist compares the coming of Christ to the arrival of a bridegroom, and Jesus is attested to have compared himself to a bridegroom in multiple gospels (Matt. 9:15, Mark 2:19, Luke 5:34). Paul also compares the relationship of Christ and the Church to the marriage relationship of a husband and wife (Rom. 7:3–4, 2 Cor. 11:2–3). The most famous Pauline reference is when the apostle is explaining household relationships including the self-sacrificial love a husband should have for his wife “as Christ loved the church.”¹⁰⁶

The theme of Jesus being the bridegroom and the Church being the bride is also utilized by the author of Revelation where the marriage actually occurs as one of the consummating events of history (Rev. 19:7–9, 21:2–3). All of these references state boldly that God, through Jesus, has made a way for humanity to have an intimate relationship with him. The type of spiritually intimate, fiercely passionate, relationship that is illustrated by a rightly ordered biblical marriage relationship between a husband and wife.¹⁰⁷

Qualities of Biblical Sex

Now that a full explanation of the purpose of biblical sex has been outlined, the qualities of biblical sex must be explored and explained. Daniel Heimbach outlines seven qualities of biblical sex that paint a radically different picture of sex than the one offered through pornography or other modern examples or definitions.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church Before the Watching World: A Practical Ecclesiology* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1974), 39.

¹⁰⁶ Ephesians 5:24–32

¹⁰⁷ Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex*, 133.

¹⁰⁸ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 142–158.

Personal

Due to the above referenced purposes of sex, the first quality of biblical sex is that it must be personal. As in, it is a union between two people and not two objects. If sex devolves from an intimate union between two people who have sworn to love and support one another in all circumstances to a transaction that reduces the other person's value to that of a "sexual gratification object," then it degrades the sanctity of sex into something base and damaging. Pornography is the ultimate expression of impersonal sex because it even lacks the physical contact required of transactional sex with another human being. Psychologically, the pornography user does not have to take another person's thoughts or feelings into account at all. It is the true commodification of sex.

This is very different from the teaching of the scripture. Starting in Genesis, the Bible teaches that all humans are made in the image of God and, therefore, it works against the natural order to treat anyone as if they were less than a full image bearer of God. This immediately rules out viewing anyone as solely an object of sexual gratification. This is exactly why slavery is evil. It is the act of one person treating another person as less than a true person made in God's image.

Referring once again to Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, the fact that Paul makes a connection from the self-sacrificial and deeply personal relationship between Christ and the Church to the sexual union of a husband and wife makes it even more apparent that sex cannot be an end in itself (Eph. 5:24–32). Just as Christ did not seek to save us only to use us, no person should pursue another with the sole purpose of using them as a sexual object.

Sex should only be the physical union of one man and one woman who have been united in a covenantal marriage. The personal connection that is both consummated and deepened by sex is not only physical but psychological, emotional, and spiritual. It should invoke the words of

Adam when he immediately broke into poetry at the first site of his wife, “bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.” (Gen. 2:23) Moreover, Genesis states that they were “naked and unashamed.” (Gen. 2:25) This was not a reference to mere physical nakedness but being before someone who knows you inside and out and loves you anyway. Sex is designed for the uniting of husband and wife with this kind of intense intimacy and there are no exceptions.¹⁰⁹

Exclusive

The second quality of biblical sex builds on the first. In order for sex to be as personal as possible then it must be exclusive. The Bible teaches that God made sex incredibly special. In fact, he made it so special that it was designed to be a one-of-a-kind experience to be enjoyed as the life-time bonding of two people who could not ever be exchanged for another. That is why marriage is the only biblically acceptable venue for sexual experience. A firmly established covenantal commitment must be in place, so that the husband and wife do not allow their transient feelings about the other’s sexual performance decide if the relationship continues.¹¹⁰ Sexual intimacy is certainly designed to be physically pleasurable but the other person’s value is based on their bearing God’s image and not their sexual performance.

The exclusivity of marriage goes back to Genesis when God declares that husband and wife become “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Jesus stated the exclusivity principle even more adamantly when he declared, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:6). The numerous instances of polygamous marriages in the Old Testament are not evidence against the Bible supporting marriage as an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman. In

¹⁰⁹ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 144.

¹¹⁰ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 145.

fact, a study of polygamy in the Old Testament shows a description of the cultural customs of the time period, not an endorsement of those customs.

Furthermore, polygamy is often portrayed as being the source of familial tension and strife. Abraham's wife, Sarah, and concubine, Hagar, are so cruel to each other that it almost results in Hagar's death (Gen. 16:4–7). Leah and Rachel, the wives of Abraham's grandson, Jacob, also had bitter jealousy and rivalry between them over the number of children they bore (Gen. 30:30). This resulted in the sisters first having as many children as they were able, and then using their servants as commodities to sleep with Jacob to have more children (Gen 30:4, 9)

In this instance, polygamy resulted in tension and jealousy between Leah and Rachel, and it also resulted in the objectification of their servants as a means to have more children. In essence, the servants were treated the same as breeding livestock. The tension and jealousy between the wives, which Jacob made worse by treating them differently (Gen. 29:31), was passed on to their sons who hated one another so much that the sons of Leah and the servants sold Rachel's son into slavery (Gen. 37:19–21). These counter examples demonstrate that God's original design of an exclusive sexual relationship in marriage between one man and one woman is the way sex was meant to be experienced and utilized. Not simply for personal pleasure or to have more children.

The exclusivity principle is also found in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The writer of Proverbs warns, "Drink water from your own cistern," which is a Hebrew euphemism to keep sex exclusive (Pro. 5:15). The author further warns that ignoring the exclusivity principle and giving full reign to sexual compulsivity will result in public and internal shame, economic loss, regret, and ultimately God's judgment (Pro. 5:9–11, 21). The author of Proverbs then states positively that his reader should "rejoice in the wife of your youth," which is a Hebrew

expression that means to stay exclusive to the first person you marry. Additionally, both Jesus and Paul in the New Testament endorse exclusivity in marriage. As mentioned earlier, Jesus blatantly states that God has brought a marriage together and man should not separate it except in extreme circumstances (Matt. 19:6). The Apostle Paul assumes the permanent exclusivity of marriage in his illustration to the Romans (Rom. 7:2–3).

Succinctly, sex is incredibly precious and should only be used exclusively as God designed. Treating sex as a commodity cheapens its value and objectifies a good and sacred gift from God.¹¹¹

Intimacy

The third quality of biblical sex, intimacy, has been referenced numerous times already because the various characteristics of sex overlap in many areas. Nevertheless, intimacy is important enough to discuss on its own.

The word, intimacy, provokes feelings of closeness, comfort, and familiarity. It is the feeling of sitting in a favorite chair or opening a book you know and love for a third reading. Despite the physical connotations of the English usage of “intimacy” (consider what is meant when two people are said to have been intimate), intimacy in the biblical sense involves not just bodies but also souls.¹¹² That is why the Apostle Paul compares the intimacy within a sexual union with the intimacy between God and His people (Eph. 5:22–23). God is all-knowing about every person’s good and bad deeds (Heb. 4:13), and he still loved humanity enough to become one of them, suffer with them, and to die in their place (Col. 2:9, 13). This description of God’s relationship with his people perfectly matches what Dr. Michael Barta defines as intimacy.

¹¹¹ Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 146.

¹¹² Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 147.

Barta writes that intimacy is the “capacity to be both vulnerable and authentic.” Barta further expounds that intimacy is “the ability to allow others to know us fully, without reservation, and to see us at our best and at our worst. With real intimacy, people feel emotionally safe because in a true partnership there are no secrets and no lies.”¹¹³

Barta’s definition can be equally applied to the biblical concept of “one-flesh.” The intimacy of the sexual union is so powerful that two people become one in the eyes of God (Gen. 2:24). This is the same Hebrew word used to describe the triune God as “one” (Deut. 6:4). God is three distinct persons that are so intimately bonded that they are one God. In short, sex must be intimate in order to be all that it can be. Sex without intimacy is a degradation of something designed to be almost divine. Heimbach states that sex without intimacy is like fire without heat. Meaning that what is left is incomplete and altered from what it was meant to be, like a car without an engine.¹¹⁴

Fruitful

The fourth quality of biblical sex outlined by Heimbach is that sex must be fruitful or productive. Stated differently, sex is not an end of itself but is always the means by which a good goal is accomplished. Once again, if sexual pleasure is the end goal, then it becomes commodified and cheapened into something less than it was designed by God. Although sex points individuals inward because of its personal, exclusive, and intimate qualities; it also points outward and builds community.¹¹⁵ This is most obvious in that sex is the means by which families are created and by extension tribes, cities, nations, and civilizations. This quality of sex

¹¹³ Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 28.

¹¹⁴ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 147.

¹¹⁵ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 147.

is what helps it fulfill its afore mentioned biblical purpose to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). The many different varieties of “fruitfulness” of sex have already been explained in the section on procreation. Suffice it to reiterate here that sex should always produce something good. Like, children, community, intimacy, as an expression of love, or as the consummation of marriage.

Selfless

The fifth quality of sex according to the Bible is selflessness. Godly sex is completely selfless, meaning that it is focused first on pleasing God and second of pleasing the partner that God has given us.¹¹⁶ As mentioned previously, sex should not only have an inward focus, but must also have an external focus to produce good. One of the good things that can be produced is the pleasure and enjoyment experienced by the partner during sexual intimacy. The more that a couple focuses on the pleasure of the other party, the more enjoyable the sexual experience will be for both. Conversely, immoral and unbiblical sex is always selfish and entitled.¹¹⁷

The Old Testament is rife with examples of selfish and destructive sex. Judah, the son of Jacob, had three sons and the oldest son’s name was Er (Gen. 38:1–6). When Er died, Judah commanded Er’s brother Onan to have sex with Er’s widow, Tamar. This was the custom of the day when a man died childless so that the dead brother may have children to carry on his name and the widow would be cared for by her brother-in-law (Deut. 25:5–10). Although Onan pretended to fulfill his responsibility by having sex with Tamar, he intentionally refused to impregnate Tamar. The text makes clear that his intentions were entirely self-centered (Gen. 38:9).

¹¹⁶ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 151.

¹¹⁷ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 151.

Another passage even more explicitly demonstrates the destructive nature of selfish sex. King David had many sons and daughters, and scripture tells us that his oldest son, Amnon, became sexually infatuated with his sister Tamar. The intense self-focus of Amnon's lust becomes clear when, after Amnon has cornered Tamar alone and made his intentions to have sex with her clear, she begs him not to rape her. She clearly sees the future detrimental consequences of Amnon's horrible intentions and spells out how she will be forever publicly shamed, and his reputation will be destroyed (2 Sam. 13:12–14). She even offers to marry Amnon to both fulfill his lust and prevent dishonor and sin from being held against them, but Amnon is so consumed with his selfish desire that he overpowers and rapes Tamar.

Amnon continues in selfishness after the terrible deed when he throws her out of his house and the text states that “He hated her more than he had loved her” (2 Sam. 13:15). He is never reported to be remorseful about destroying Tamar's life and this episode is one of the precipitating events that leads to an Israelite civil war and the deaths of many. Amnon cared nothing about any of that. He did not care about God, his sister, nor his own reputation and was completely consumed by the desire for self-centered sex.¹¹⁸

Selfless service to a spouse is a hallmark of all biblical marriages and married couples that extended selflessness into the bedroom grow more intense and loving. Those more defined by self-pleasing sex rarely last.¹¹⁹

Complex

The sixth quality of biblical sexuality is an appreciation for the complex nature of sex. Modern western culture mostly keeps sex in the physical realm. It is mostly discussed from a

¹¹⁸ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 152.

¹¹⁹ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 152.

recreational or health direction with little acknowledgement of the multidimensional nature of sex.

The Bible describes human life as being made up of three separate dimensions. The physical, spiritual, and mental (or emotional). The Old Testament teaches the people of God to love him with all their “heart, soul, and strength” (Deut. 6:4), and Paul teaches Christians to keep their “whole spirit, soul and body... blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23). Human beings are complex creatures and sex is equally multidimensional. Like humanity, sex has physical, spiritual, and mental facets that together form the totality of a sexual experience. Sex was designed to unite a husband and wife on all three levels, so sex that attempts to isolate one or two of the dimensions to the exclusion of the others becomes immoral and false.¹²⁰

This principle is implied by Jesus when he chastised the Pharisees for their teaching on sexual morality. The Pharisees attempted to isolate sex completely to the physical dimension by insisting that a physical connection must exist before a person committed a sexual sin. Jesus left no room for this interpretation by counter insisting that sex is not all physical, but it is equally mental and emotional. The two facets are so equally important that Jesus says gazing upon a woman lustfully is just as immoral as having sex with her (Matt. 5:28).

The Apostle Paul emphasizes another dimension when he exhorts the Corinthian believers to flee from sexual immorality because their bodies are now inhabited by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:18-19). He even outright states that Christians having sex with temple prostitutes somehow unites Christ with those prostitutes. Paul draws these conclusions because he knows that sex is not just a physical unity but also a spiritual unity. Paul further illustrates the spiritual

¹²⁰ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 152.

dimension of sex when he advises married couples not to abstain from sexual intercourse with one another, except for short periods of time devoted to prayer (1 Cor. 7:5a). The reasoning he gives for not abstaining is “so that Satan may not tempt” them (1 Cor. 7:5b). Paul can only write this because he knows that sex is not just the physical union between husband and wife but also has the spiritual effect of inoculating the Christian couple against sinful temptation.¹²¹

This demonstrates that the biblical picture of sex is not just exalted, but it is also complex and multidimensional. Any view of sex that attempts to isolate one of the dimensions away from the others will be wrong and destructive.

Complementary

The final quality that sex has (according to the Bible) is complementarity. Men and women are equally human and equal in worth and dignity before God (Gen. 1:27). However, they are different from one another down to their DNA. Sex unites two beings that were uniquely designed to be united. Complementary does not mean different, as apples and oranges, but more like two different pieces of the same puzzle or the many parts of an engine that come together to create something greater than the individual pieces.¹²²

Complementarity is visible early in the biblical narrative. It is written that Adam had looked over all of God’s creation and could not find anything that was like him (Gen. 2:20). No animal, mountain, river, or any created being was a suitable companion for him, and God declared this situation “not good” (Gen. 2:18). God’s plan to correct the situation was not to create another man like Adam, but to create a perfectly different companion—someone who was like him, but not like him; someone whose sexuality perfectly complemented his own. It was

¹²¹ Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 154.

¹²² Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality*, 156.

such a wonderful and amazing creation that Adam broke into poetry upon seeing Eve for the first time (Gen. 2:23).

The complementary nature of sex is why both sex with animals and sex with the same gender are strictly prohibited in scripture (Lev. 18:22-23). Homosexual sex is actually referred to as “contrary to nature” by Paul and “unnatural” by Jude (Rom. 1:26-27, Jude 7). Just like the other aspects of sex, if an individual or society attempts to separate sex from its complementarity then it will be wrong and less than it should be.

Chapter 7: Apologetic

Sex and pornography addiction are such a vast and complex area of research and discussion that the apologetic from Christianity birthed from it is equally expansive and multifaceted. The previous sections have outlined in detail how pornography addiction begins and is maintained, as well as the effects of pornography addiction on both the individual and their immediate family.

Moreover, the outline of biblical sexuality demonstrates a coherent and comprehensive worldview for sex and sexual activity that anticipated the problems of deviating from the biblical template and provides logical reasons for why pornography would be so addicting and damaging. This evidence suggests that a scriptural view of sex is not as oppressive or repressive as thought by many since the Enlightenment.

The previous section implied an apologetic through showing how the biblical doctrines regarding sexual activity create a complete and holistic picture of sex that deals with many of the issues and problems created by pornography use as discussed in the beginning of the argument. The following discussion will build an evidentialist argument by taking a specific passage (James 1:12-17) and comparing it to modern addiction and recovery theories to demonstrate that

the Bible had already explained the addiction cycle and the path to recovery long before the modern discipline of psychology even existed.

First, what is evidentialism? Evidentialist apologetics is one of the oldest methods that Christians have used to defend the truth of Christian theism throughout the millennium. It involves building a cumulative defense around specific evidence, such as historical or scientific facts, to defend Christian doctrine.¹²³

The New Testament itself contains many examples of evidentialist apologetics. Prime illustrations are the claims of certain books being direct eyewitness testimony (Luke 1:1-4, 2 Peter 1:16) and the myriad miracle accounts that are explained in detail (Matt. 8:1-4, Acts 2:4-12, Luke 24:1-6).

This section will build on this venerable tradition by building a case for the reliability of Scripture and the Gospel by showing how the Bible outlined a precursor to the addiction cycle and how the Bible's solution for addiction has been validated. The goal of this section is not to create a watertight argument for the truth of the Bible, but to provide enough evidence to make the reliability of Scripture plausible.

Anticipating The Addiction Cycle

The Bible is remarkably accurate in identifying the way that pornography lures, entices, traps, and eventually kills or enslaves its victim. This process closely mirrors what modern research has dubbed the addiction cycle. Although other passages will be referenced, James 1:12-17 will be the anchor. It states:

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted

¹²³ William Lane Craig et al., *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 63.

with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

The addiction cycle contains six phases: dormant, trigger, preparation, acting out, regret, and reconstitution.¹²⁴ These six phases have a precursor in the above cited passage from the biblical book of James, authored by a leader of the first century Jerusalem Church who was also Jesus' half-brother. Although James' list is couched in moral and spiritual terms that psychological literature goes to great lengths to avoid, the core themes of the addiction cycle can still be found in James' writing.

To state the difference simply, James' writing proceeds from, and is meant to cultivate in the reader, a worldview that sees the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental aspects of a person simultaneously while modern counselors and psychologists focus on the physical, mental, and emotional aspects with only secondary importance given to spiritual matters. Additionally, when psychologists speak of spirituality, it is often not clear if they mean anything different than a feeling experienced by the individual instead of an actual transcendent reality. Despite the differences, the two lists can be paired in this way: trigger and lured or enticed by desire; preparation and conception; sin and acting out; and death can be paired with both regret and reconstitution.

James' list begins with an individual being lured and enticed by their own desire. This first step of falling into sin is closely related to the addiction cycles' first phase of being triggered (setting aside the dormant phase). The two terms even utilize similar imagery.

¹²⁴ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 52-58.

Although the term triggered has a broad use in today's society, psychologically it refers to a person, place, or situation that sets off an automatic response in the brain. Much like a trigger on a rifle that engages a mechanism that strikes the primer and sends the bullet flying through the air, a psychological trigger engages the brain's limbic system and reward circuitry and prompts the brain to perform certain behaviors or seek out certain substances. Pornography and masturbation are prime examples of a sought-after behavior. Although this process is subconscious, the addict can utilize certain tools and strategies to slow or halt the brain's response once they are aware of what is happening to them.

James' metaphor describes an identical process. Utilizing fishing imagery instead of a mechanical process, James vividly paints the picture of a desirable looking morsel that seems to be externally appealing. Like a trigger, the lure is enticing. Although James is writing about the process that proceeds all sin, the Bible is clear that sexual sin is particularly attractive on the surface.

This is demonstrated by the Bible's exhortation to resist the devil (James 4:7) but to flee from sexual sin (1 Cor. 6:18). If sex (as a whole) is an especially luring bait, then pornography is the most appealing form of sexual immorality. Pornography promises sexual gratification without the dangers of a physical sexual act. There is no risk of pregnancy, STDs, and little to no risk of messy emotional entanglement. However, once the lure is taken, the pornography viewed and masturbated to, the hook begins to be reeled back. This culminates in dragging the individual into viewing pornography with greater frequency and or increasing intensity.

Both addiction specialists and the Bible agree that being triggered or "lured and enticed" (James 1:14) are not morally wrong or psychologically unhealthy, but a normal part of human

existence.¹²⁵ Not all who are tempted succumb to sin, and not all who are triggered give into their addictive habits.

Furthermore, psychological research has demonstrated that triggers can be almost anything that produces negative or painful thoughts, negative emotions or simply producing opportunity to indulge in pornography.¹²⁶ These triggers cause the brain to desire to mitigate its own pain or boredom by seeking something pleasurable and numbing. This is described by James as our “desire,” with the Greek word for desire carrying connotations of evil desires or corrupted desires.¹²⁷ This is especially relevant in the case of pornography addiction.

Psychologists generally agree that the problem is not with sexual activity in general, but with the uniquely impersonal and extreme nature of pornography and that is almost always instantly available in any variety desired. This is what makes pornography neurologically damaging and addictive and sexual activity between committed partners healthy and constructive.¹²⁸ James would agree with psychologists on the point that sex is a good gift created by God (James 1:17) because the goodness of sex between a married man and woman is supported by the Old Testament (Gen. 2:24), but desires for sex that do not conform with God’s created purpose for sex are twisted and destructive.

Pornography takes God’s good gift and cheapens it. Sex that should be defined by intimacy, complexity, pleasure, exclusivity, and selflessness between two people is warped into a depersonalized image on a screen that is designed to be consumed with no commitment from the

¹²⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 71.

¹²⁶ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 52–53.

¹²⁷ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 70.

¹²⁸ Thaddeus Birchard and Joanna Benfield, *Routledge International Handbook of Sexual Addiction* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 55.

viewer. Sex should be enjoyed by two people that are so committed and safe with one another that they decided to formalize their bond through marriage.

Pornography is the very definition of a shadow of something else (James 1:17)—dark and without substance. The sexual gratification of pornography is completely self-focused, lacking in complexity (meaning that it focuses specifically on physical pleasure to the exclusion of spiritual and emotional pleasure and connection), anonymous, and inclusive to whoever wishes to view the intimate act.

The addiction cycle’s next phase is “preparation,” which can be likened to what James calls conception and pregnancy. As previously mentioned, the preparation phase of the addiction cycle can last mere moments as the individual opens a web page or it can last for hours as the addict scrolls through hundreds of videos before acting out.¹²⁹ The preparation phase also involves efforts to conceal the actions of the addict. Addicts create excuses to be online or to be alone and lie to friends and loved ones about time or money spent on pornography. Whether long or short, the preparation phase is an active process wherein the individual has the choice to either resist the limbic response and break the addiction cycle, or to succumb to the trigger.

Conception is an analogy not too far removed from preparation. Instead of naming it preparation or ritualization,¹³⁰ James compares the development of sin to a pregnant woman first conceiving, then carrying the child as it develops, and finally, giving birth to a fully developed baby (James 1:15). This alludes to the active responses of an individual to temptation. The individual is enticed by the attractive veneer of the temptation.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 54.

¹³⁰ Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows* (Center City: Hazelden Information & Edu, 2001), Ch 1: The Addiction Cycle.

¹³¹ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 71.

In the case of pornography, “conception” happened when an individual experiences a trigger which reminds them of all the allure and promises of pornography. Then, the individual carries their “baby” to term by preparing to view pornography through the various rituals and processes discussed in the addiction cycle section of this paper. The connection between trigger/preparation and lured and entice by desire/conception is more obvious when the inspiration of James’ warnings is considered.

In all likelihood, the Old Testament passage about the adulterous women in Proverbs 5-9 is an underlying text to James’ own writing.¹³² The adulterous woman is described as being outwardly enticing. She is beautiful and sexually attractive (Pro.5:20, 6:25). She is readily sexually available (Pro. 7:10, 12-13, 18) and she is full of verbal affirmation and flattery (Pro. 5:3, 7:21). However, despite her veneer of beauty, the author makes it clear that her attractiveness is only skin deep and the end result of taking her bait is nothing but virtual enslavement and death (Pro. 5:5, 9-14, 6:33, 7:22-23, 27). James’ bait and lure analogy is a simple summarization of the proverbs of the adulterous woman. James’ earlier mention of wisdom (Jam. 1:5) makes the connection more likely.

Once the preparation is complete, the individual will move into the next phase of the addiction cycle called, “acting out.” For a pornography addict, this usually involves viewing pornography and masturbating. This is the culmination of the preparation or the climax of the addict’s ritual. To continue the comparison to James, it is the moment when the woman finally gives birth after forty weeks of pregnancy. James’ calls the climax sin. The word translated as sin in Greek is *hamartia*, which means “to miss the mark.”¹³³

¹³² Moo, *The Letter of James*, 71-72.

¹³³ Meriam-Webster, s.v. “Hamartia;” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hamartia>

For an addict, missing the mark is exactly what happens when they act out. They are shooting for connection, intimacy, validation, and happiness and they are hoping for the destruction of the negative feelings that plague their perception of themselves and the world, and the results of pornography seem to hit the target. They feel calm and relaxed in the immediate aftermath but, eventually, pornography begins to take more than it promised to give and damage to the addict's physiology, psychology, social life, and spirituality. Acting out truly does miss the mark and is rightly called, "sin," by James.

The final item on James' list, death, can be paired with the last two steps in the addiction cycle: regret and reconstitution. It can also be applied to the slow, or quick, unraveling of an addict's life as he repeats the addiction cycle over and over again. This is often called unmanageability.

An objection of exaggeration may be raised to James' use of death as the end result of sin, or addiction. It would be reasonable for a modern reader to admit that James had discovered some good points but this last bit about death must be a strictly spiritual interpretation and has no real comparison to the addiction cycle. However, many pornography addicts who complete the addiction cycle repeatedly, often find that they have worked their way into situations that feel like death and, in some cases, may be worse than death. This can include the addict's life collapsing via divorce, job loss, public humiliation, being arrested, and sometimes even physical death.

As aforementioned, the implosion of the addict's life happens when their ability to juggle their addiction and their everyday responsibilities becomes unmanageable.¹³⁴ Also, being aware of the spiritual reality behind addiction is not only for first-century disciples of Christ but is

¹³⁴ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, Ch 1: The Addiction Cycle.

increasingly referenced in psychological literature. As previously mentioned in the effects of pornography section, the spiritual impact of pornography has been well attested.¹³⁵

To summarize, pornography usage can cause increasing feelings of guilt and shame because addicts are not living up to commonly held ideals of their church, religious community, or their own personal commitments to self-control. This in turn causes the addict to increasingly isolate themselves from their spiritual community because of an intense feeling of shame or regret and hypocrisy. All of this can lead to the individual feeling distant from their God or feeling any type of spiritual connection.

Therefore, it can be freely admitted that when James writes that uncontrolled desire leads eventually to death, he is primarily referring to spiritual death.¹³⁶ This is not a disagreement in results with psychology but in emphasis. Although physical death can sometimes result from a desire given unmitigated free reign in a human life, spiritual death is always a result, and this is the most pressing concern for James and the orthodox Christian tradition. However, the Christian tradition, and especially James, is clear that spiritual realities directly impact the physical world and vice versa.

Consequently, an individual can be physically alive but spiritually “dead” and this spiritual death has consequences in the individual’s physical life. Psychologists, often viewing their craft from a materialist or at least materialist influenced position, will place the emphasis on the physical cause and symptoms of addiction and only address the spiritual as preceding from the physical. Despite the difference in emphasis, and it is an important difference, James and the

¹³⁵ Chisholm and Gall, “Shame and the X-Rated Addiction,” 263.

¹³⁶ Craig L. Blomberg, Mariam J. Kovalishyn, and Clinton E. Arnold, *James* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins, 2008), 66.

addiction researchers and counselors describe similar consequences and symptoms. James calls them “death” and the psychologists call them “regret” or “unmanageability.”

In other passages outside of James, the Bible gives various descriptions and symptoms of spiritual death. Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul state that spiritual death is closely linked to being enslaved to sin (John 8:34, Rom. 6:16). Paul also describes those lost in spiritual death as living under the power of Satan while “gratifying the cravings of (their) flesh and following its desires and thoughts” (Eph. 2:3, NIV).

Any addict knows that slavery is an excellent parallel to addiction and Philippe Bensimon unintentionally echoes the Apostle Paul when he writes that addicts are “captive to their desires.”¹³⁷ Paula Hall states that after addicts return to the dormant phase, they can use cognitive distortions and other addictions to convince themselves that everything is okay, but it is only a fantasy.¹³⁸ The vulnerability in their mind and spirit is still there and is only lying dormant until the next trigger pulls the addict back through the addiction cycle. Furthermore, the Bible says that those who are spiritually dead may have their conscience numbed (1 Tim. 4:2, Rom. 1:26).

In both scriptures, the Apostle Paul describes a process where individuals or groups have believed false teachings and sinned so regularly that they no longer view certain acts as morally wrong as they once would have. Although addicts do often carry shame because of their actions, they have often lost sight of what actions are good and helpful to them and their families and what is wrong and harmful. Although the Bible verses have much broader application than for just addicts, the scriptures give an accurate description of how an addict’s conscience is numbed

¹³⁷ Birchard and Benfield, *Routledge International Handbook of Sexual Addiction*, 73.

¹³⁸ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 58.

and how the numbing is maintained. This is primarily accomplished by an overly sexualized environment and cognitive distortions.

1 Timothy 4:1-5 describes individuals who have been ensnared by an environment and culture full of “deceitful spirits” and “liars” who take God’s good gifts and teach others to misuse them. This is an excellent parallel to modern culture in which is so sex saturated that a recovering pornography addict has trouble getting out of bed in the morning without seeing something potentially triggering in ads, television, art, music, or the people he passes in the street. This trend has been noted and aptly labeled as the “triumph of the erotic” in our culture by Carl Trueman.¹³⁹

The fact that most if not all pornography addicts have grown up in a highly sexualized environment and often are exposed to explicit pornography at a young age (41% in one survey¹⁴⁰), means that they truly have been deceived by the “liars” and “deceitful spirits” of our age that promise sexual liberation and satisfaction via sexual indulgence. The consumeristic, pleasure driven, self-centered sexual education they have received from western culture is simply the air that they breathe—despite the fact that it is choking them to death.

Another aspect of a numbed conscience is the presence of strong cognitive distortions. According to Paul, these cognitive distortions end in sexual perversion and other forms of community destroying behavior because of the numbed conscience. He states that these groups and individuals “suppress(ed) the truth” (Rom. 1:18), “became futile in their thinking” (Rom. 1:21), had “their foolish hearts darkened” (Rom. 1:21)—often “claiming to be wise” but becoming “fools” (Rom. 1:22).

¹³⁹ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 254-255.

¹⁴⁰ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 38.

The Apostle Paul further explains that God, after trying to persuade these individuals away from evil, “gives them up to dishonorable passions” (Rom. 1:26) and to a “debased mind” (Rom. 1:28). This descent into the “debased mind” is strikingly similar to the creation and maintenance of cognitive distortions.

Cognitive distortions are ways of thinking that allow individuals or groups to do what they want to do, even though they know it is wrong.¹⁴¹ They may rationalize, minimize, justify, or completely deny the problem entirely. Addicts may blame other people or situations as the primary cause of their acting out. All of these versions of cognitive distortions are ways of denying responsibility for their own actions and “suppress(ing) the truth” (Rom.1:18).¹⁴²

According to Thaddeus Birchard, cognitive distortions result from erroneous core beliefs.¹⁴³ If an individual believes “I am worthless” or “I am a failure” or “I am unlovable,” the addict will filter all the experiences of their life through the lens of their false core belief and will impact how they see situations, their friends, their family, and especially themselves. Without help, the addict will truly suffer from a debased mind that cannot see truth and a completely darkened heart as the Apostle Paul warned.

Other results of debased and foolish thinking (or cognitive distortions) includes increasing sexual perversion away from God’s created purpose for sex (Rom. 1:26-27) and a plethora of community destroying behaviors. The Apostle Paul states that those who are spiritually dead and debased in their thinking are full of “unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice . . . envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness” (Rom 1:29). He continues by describing

¹⁴¹ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 54.

¹⁴² Thaddeus Birchard, *Over Coming Sex Addiction* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 114.

¹⁴³ Birchard, *Over Coming Sex Addiction*, 115-116.

these individuals as “slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, (and) boastful” (Rom 1:30).

Although the Apostle has a much broader application for his description of the spiritually dead, it is remarkable how much the first chapter of Romans describes the experience of many addicts.

Thaddeus Birchard mirrors many of the Apostle’s conclusions when he lists the various specific thinking errors and the behaviors they produce. Black and White thinking is an error that causes the individual to see everything as either right or wrong, good or bad. This way of thinking allows for very little gray area in life. Therefore, those who hold to Black and White thinking often have little compassion and can quickly become persecutors of those around them.¹⁴⁴

Another thinking error identified by Birchard is called Mind Reading. The individual who has this thinking error sees interprets other people’s action in light of their own erroneous core belief. They can receive a neutral message from a family member and either react in hostility towards the message sender because of a perceived and imaginary slight or they will react hostility towards themselves because the message clearly insinuates that they have done something wrong. In reality, the message sender was only trying to decline an invitation to lunch, but the Mind Reader filters the facts through their cognitive distortions and can only see the declination as something ominous.¹⁴⁵

Although there are many more errors of thinking, one more example will suffice for the comparison with the Apostles’ words. Emotional Reasoning is a thinking error that interprets their emotional state as a fact. This individual will think, “My boss’s words made me feel bad; therefore, I must be bad,” or “My boss’s words made me feel bad; therefore, she is bad.” Instead

¹⁴⁴ Birchard, *Over Coming Sex Addiction*, 116.

¹⁴⁵ Birchard, *Over Coming Sex Addiction*, 116.

of viewing the world as facts to be interpreted with reason and supported by the evidence of emotion, the emotional reasoner will only see the world through his/her current emotional state.

An astute thinker will read though Romans 1:29-30 and the corresponding thinking errors caused by cognitive distortions and their associated community destroying behavior and raise the objection that only some of the individuals match the Apostle Paul's description of evil, malicious, strife-ridden God haters. Individuals who are external in their behavior's match Paul's description, but the ones who are more internally-minded harm no one but themselves. This objection, while reasonable at first glance, does not pass inspection upon further thought.

The individual's internally focused self-consumed thoughts are in fact harmful to others. For example, if individual A receives an email declining to attend lunch from individual B and individual A perceives that the declination was given due to individual B finding some fault in individual A; then, individual A may not send any future invites to individual B or trust individual B with any personal information due to the false perception that individual B finds something wrong with individual A. This internal behavior, although not explosive or malicious, still results in a damaged or destroyed friendship or business association and causes the individual with the erroneous thinking to act in ways that are incapable of building or maintaining relationships.

This has scientific support in the form of surveys taken of addicts who say that they feel unable to make a spiritual connection with their God like they could before their addiction took root.¹⁴⁶ Part of the reasoning for this involves the regret and shame felt by the individual for once again failing to live up to their own standards or not being able to control themselves or not

¹⁴⁶ Chisholm and Gall, "Shame and the X-Rated Addiction," 263.

living up to the moral code of their chosen faith community. Feeling like a hypocrite greatly increases the sense of shame and regret felt by the individual.¹⁴⁷

Finally, the Bible agrees with modern researchers that pornography's destructive and addictive power does not lessen the benefits and inborn virtues associated with sexual intercourse. Research has only demonstrated that sex without limits has not resulted in the freedom promised by the sexual revolution. The researchers do not agree where the limits of sexual activity should be, but many have discovered the destructive power of corrupted sex in the form of pornography.

Although James is not writing about sexual activity specifically, he does make it clear that all good gifts come from God (James 1:17) and the previous section titled, "The Biblical Purpose of Sex," clearly outlined how the whole Bible states that sex is included as one of God's good gifts. The Bible's description of what happens to an individual who has been overcome with their own corrupted desire, typified by James' description of falling into sin, describes a similar process as the addiction cycle with the added benefit of approaching the topic from a more holistic train of thought.

While the addiction cycle is purely materialist and psychological, Scripture addresses the topic in physical and spiritual terms. The more holistic approach will become more important as the biblical method of recovery is compared to current recovery models.

Recovery

Abstinence is not sobriety. This short adage is often repeated in numerous variations within recovery circles and clearly states that the addictive behavior was only a symptom of a

¹⁴⁷ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 94.

deeper “root” that must be pulled out. Abstinence is defined as not doing or abstaining from the addict’s compulsive behavior(s) or choice.¹⁴⁸

For a pornography addict, abstinence can mean avoiding all pornography (including material that is not pornographic but may be sexually arousing). It may also involve abstaining from masturbation or partnered sex except with one’s spouse. Addiction is a highly specific to each individual so what constitutes abstinence for one person may be different than for another individual.

Sobriety, which was long considered to be synonymous with abstinence, is a more difficult term to define.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, a definition for sobriety is important to help the addict understand what their end goal should be. Many alcoholics have successfully abstained from alcohol but regularly indulge in compulsive eating or serial sexual encounters. These individuals have only switched addictions and the underlying motivation for the addiction is still present.

Therefore, while abstinence can be thought of as step one of recovery, or the recovery of the behavior, sobriety is the second step of recovery, or the recovery of the mind. Sobriety can be roughly defined as building a mindset that is free of compulsive thinking and uncontrollable emotionally reactions.¹⁵⁰

What addicts and researchers have slowly learned over the last fifty years, the Bible has taught in a more holistic and comprehensive way for the last two-thousand years—namely, that a person’s immoral or harmful behaviors (or sins) are only a symptom of the deeper issue of a corrupted and broken heart. This is one of the main themes of Jesus’ teaching and a key element

¹⁴⁸ Paula Helm, “Sobriety versus Abstinence, How 12-Steppers Negotiate Recovery Across Groups,” *Addiction Research and Theory* 27, no. 1 (2019): 33.

¹⁴⁹ Helm, “Sobriety versus Abstinence,” 34.

¹⁵⁰ Helm, “Sobriety versus Abstinence,” 35.

in the most famous compilation of his doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Jesus states that while the behavior of murdering another person is wrong, the real problem is a broken mind that grows hatefully angry with another human being and becomes capable of the murder mentally before the physical act of murder is committed (Matt. 5:21-23).

In another passage, Jesus confirms that while behavior of committing adultery is immoral, the true issue is a mind bent and corrupted to look at other human beings as sexual objects to be used instead of fellow creatures made in the image of God (Matt. 5:27-28). Jesus makes the point more explicit when He states that even good deeds can be bad when done with the wrong motivation. For example, he commends the practice of caring for the most vulnerable in society but cautions against doing it from the inappropriate and destructive motivation of self-glory (Matt. 6:2-4). Outside the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus castigates the highly religious Pharisees for meticulously practicing religious rituals but having minds that were not dedicated to mercy, justice, and faithfulness to God (Matt. 23:23).

It has been demonstrated that both Scripture and modern addiction research agree that an addict's problem (or every person's problem according to Jesus) is not ultimately about the behavior but about an unhealthy and destructive mindset or heart in biblical language. Recovery from addiction, specifically pornography addiction, demonstrates that the Bible's long taught principles have recently been confirmed by psychological research and, therefore, should be viewed as a trustworthy source of truth.

There are many different models of recovery of pornography addiction from talk therapy to positive psychology and many more. This section will focus on comparing three prominent recovery models and their similarity to the Bible's description of redemption. The three recovery models to be examined are CHOICE, TINSAs, and the famous 12-Steps.

First, so that the comparison is clear, an outline of biblical redemption must be sketched.

The *ordo salutis* (or order of salvation) is the name given by theologians to God's redemptive work.¹⁵¹ The following is a complete list of elements as described by Wayne Grudem in his book on systematic theology:

1. Election (God's choice of people to be saved)
2. The Gospel call (proclaiming the message of the gospel)
3. Regeneration (being born again)
4. Conversion (faith and repentance)
5. Justification (right legal standing)
6. Adoption (membership in God's family)
7. Sanctification (right conduct of life)
8. Perseverance (remaining a Christian)
9. Death (going to be with the Lord)
10. Glorification (receiving a resurrection body)¹⁵²

While all these elements will be discussed, some will be discussed at greater length because of their greater relevance to addiction recovery.

Election is described by Grudem as "an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any unforeseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign and good pleasure."¹⁵³ While there has been much controversy over the doctrine of election over the centuries, the Bible paints a positive picture of the doctrine and not a bleak fatalistic one.

Election is expounded in some parts of scripture to comfort Christians going through persecution or difficult periods of life. These passages describe a God that is so in control of events that even the evil in the world will be used by God for good, no matter what the intention of the human perpetrator is (Rom. 8:28). Election is also listed as a reason to praise God because

¹⁵¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 816.

¹⁵² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 817.

¹⁵³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 818.

the work of redeeming humanity is ultimately His work and not ours (1 Thess. 1:2). This relieves Christians of the anxiety of trying to save themselves through good works.

Because of the doctrine of election, Christians can be motivated by love to do good works and not by the fear of judgment. Election is a key element of a human's redemption, especially when combined with what the Bible teaches about individual responsibility—namely, that mankind is fully responsible for all their actions (2 Cor. 5:10, Ezek. 18:20). Although this thesis does not have the space to discuss the divine mystery of how God's sovereignty and man's responsibility harmonize, it is sufficient to state that scripture teaches that God is completely in control of all things and that each individual is completely responsible for both the good and evil that they do. The most important action that humans are responsible for is their response to the next element in the *ordo salutis*.

The next element in the order of salvation is the Gospel call. This is the famous altar call of a Billy Graham camp meeting, the individual reading C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*, or an individual being invited to coffee by a believing friend and having the gospel shared with them. Grudem defines the call succinctly as “an act of God the Father, speaking through the human proclamation of the Gospel, in which he summons people to himself...”¹⁵⁴ Although the election of God happens in the mystery of God's providence before the foundation of the world, the Gospel call is a definite point of the historical timeline and it is followed by the next step in the order of salvation, regeneration.

While the individual person plays an important role in most of the subsequent steps of the order of salvation, the first three are entirely the work of God. This is especially true for

¹⁵⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 843.

regeneration that is “the secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us.”¹⁵⁵ This is described as giving the individual a “new heart” that is capable of desiring, thinking, and acting in a way that is in accord with the way of God (Ezek. 36:26-27). The Bible goes as far as saying that the person regenerated has died and been “born again” (John 3:3) and is a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). While regeneration does not instantaneously make the person perfect in all their thoughts and actions, it does mean that the motivation a trajectory of their life will change away from continuous indulgence in sin and towards great righteousness (1 John 3:9, Gal. 5:22-23)

The next three elements of the order of salvation overlap, significantly. Conversion is the human act of admitting to being sinful and unable to save themselves and to then place their trust in Christ for redemption.¹⁵⁶ At the time of regeneration (which may also be the time of conversation), the individual is completely justified before God and adopted as a child of God. Being justified means to be legally forgiven and declared no longer liable for past sins despite the many times that individual had previously transgressed God’s law.¹⁵⁷

Adoption means that the new believer has literally been adopted into the family of God (1 John 3:1-2). Therefore, the new believer is completely cleared of guilt before the divine judge and formally adopted into God’s family with the full love of the father and right to inherit all the blessings of God (Rom. 8:14-17).

The next element in the order of salvation is sanctification or the “progressive work of God and man that makes (Christians) more free from sin and like Christ in (their) actual

¹⁵⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 850.

¹⁵⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 861.

¹⁵⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 885.

lives.”¹⁵⁸ Sanctification begins at the time of regeneration and constitutes moral improvement and a lessening in desire to sin.¹⁵⁹ Although it is never a fully completed process in this life, the believer will make noticeable progress.¹⁶⁰

Sanctification involves the active, and sometimes grinding, effort of the individual as he/she works to remove sinful habits and ways of thinking and replace them with positive ones. It also requires the passive participation of the believer as he/she submits to God and allow him to sanctify him/her (Rom. 6:13). In the end, sanctification will be completed after death and fully realized in the new heaven and new earth (1 Cor. 15:23, 15:49)

What do the elements in the order of salvation already discussed have to do with addiction recovery? The answer is that addiction recovery programs are remarkably similar to the order of salvation and the order of salvation provides a more holistic way of recovery than many of the secular programs.

First, many addicts’ recovery story includes a process similar to the Gospel call and subsequent conversion. For some, it is literally hearing a “call” from a friend, family member, boss, or counselor alert them that they have a problem that is hurting them and the people they love, and that they need to get help. They are called to recognize this harmful pattern and to turn away from it to seek recovery.

This is obvious in the 12 -Steps where step one is to have the addict admit that they are powerless over the addiction and that their lives had become unmanageable.¹⁶¹ This step breaks

¹⁵⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 924.

¹⁵⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 925.

¹⁶⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 927.

¹⁶¹ John Baker, *Growing in Christ While Helping Others: Participants Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 11.

the addict out of their false core beliefs, which is the first step in CHOICE recovery. “C” stands for core beliefs and Paula Hall states that the addict must first break their erroneous core belief.¹⁶²

Hall discusses various different versions of false core beliefs, but they generally fall into three categories: I don’t need to change, I don’t want to change, and I can’t change. The TINSAs model of recovery also points out the unhealthy mindset of the newly sober addict and calls it a self-regulated mind. It is characterized by viewing emotions and intimate connections as a weakness or dangerous and is completely self-consumed.¹⁶³ The self-regulating addict is often not even aware of the true extent of the harm they are doing to themselves and others until their secret sexual habits are discovered or some other “rock bottom” event occurs.

Each of these recovery programs hits on important aspects of an addict’s recovery but the biblical doctrine of redemption has a complete and holistic approach that is thousands of years old. Just like the recovery models, the Bible teaches that people have erroneous core beliefs that are leading them into destructive habits and ways of thinking.

Paul states that humanity’s mind has been blinded by Satan so that they cannot see the truth (2 Cor. 4:4). He also states elsewhere that those locked in worshipping created things (i.e. using those things as their source of comfort and protection from the trials of life) instead of the creator claim to be wise but are really foolish and that their mind is debased and incapable of seeing reality (Rom. 1:22, 1:28-22). These people are completely consumed with their own wants and desires and the Bible says that “their god is their belly” (Phil. 3:19).

¹⁶² Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 107.

¹⁶³ Barta, *TINSAs®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 126-127.

Belly is used euphemistically in this passage to mean bodily desires and those who have chosen to reject God make a god out of their bellies and “all their care is to please it and make provision for it.”¹⁶⁴ They have little to no control over their life.

Ironically, to get more control of their life the addict usually needs to first give up their control. For example, a pornography addict can spend years trying various tricks and behavioral training to free themselves of the compulsion, and they may be able to maintain a level of abstinence for a time. However, as previously mentioned, abstinence is not sobriety, and “white knuckling” abstinence will only last until the addict’s will power burns out. To truly stop the compulsion and heal the internal wounds, the addict must give up their control and “believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore (them) to sanity.”¹⁶⁵

In the TINSA model, this involves purposefully connecting with others in recovery “to practice authenticity, taking direction, allowing support, being vulnerable, and learning to identify, understand, regulate, and practice healthy expression of emotion.”¹⁶⁶ This giving up of control mirrors the Christian doctrine of conversion where the individual gives up trying to save themselves, admits their previous way of life was in serious error, and gives control of their lives to God. This is expressed as claiming “Jesus as Lord” (Rom. 10:9), which has the overlapping meanings of claiming that Jesus is God and he has rightful control over the confessor’s life as the King of the earth. It is also described as being a “slave of God” (Rom. 6:22) as opposed to being a slave of lies and destructive behaviors and that, ironically, being enslaved by God results in the individual’s true freedom (Rom. 6:22 and John 8:32).

¹⁶⁴ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Hendrickson, 1991) 2327.

¹⁶⁵ John Baker, *Growing in Christ While Helping Others*, 11.

¹⁶⁶ Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 128.

Next, most recovery programs will have the addict write out or voice a vision of a new life. This could be a healed marriage, a better relationship with children or parents, a more fruitful career, or simply a life of their own choosing instead of a life dictated by pornography and sexual compulsion. The CHOICE model states that in order to go through the painful and grinding work of recovery, the addict must have a clear vision of a better future that is rooted in their core values.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, the 12-Steps has the addict work through what aspects of their life they dislike and what they want their life to look like.

While the TINSAs model does not have the addict formulate their own vision of a better life, they do promise that the end result of the hard work of recovery is developing healthy coping mechanisms, developing the ability to be truly intimate with others, and living a full abundant life.¹⁶⁸ The order of salvation also has a vision, but it is not just of a better future. The vision presented by Christianity is instantly made a spiritual reality before God and will one day become fully realized when Jesus returns to make all things new.

The current reality includes the doctrines of justification, adoption, and sanctification. The doctrine of justification tells the individual that they are no longer condemned as guilty before God for their past indiscretions (Rom. 8:1). The doctrine of adoption tells the addict that they are not just forgiven for past wrongs, but that they are fully adopted into God's family and can now call themselves a son or daughter of God (John 1:12). Finally, the doctrine of sanctification tells the addict that God will be with them and will help them through the hard work of putting off harmful and destructive behaviors and ways of thinking and starting healthy behaviors and ways of thinking (Matt 28:20, Phil 1:6). These current realities and promises are

¹⁶⁷ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 129.

¹⁶⁸ Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 117.

broad enough that each individual addict apply these to the circumstances of their individual lives.

Furthermore, the future realities promised by the doctrine of glorification can act as a future anchor for when the addict goes through particularly dark times. Unlike a vision rooted in material things, God's promise to make all sad things come untrue through glorification cannot be shaken or altered. Despite an addict's best efforts, a marriage can end in divorce, they can relapse, they can experience lifelong consequences of their past compulsive behaviors, or they can suffer new life struggles (like health issues or the death of a loved one) that make recovery from addiction look inconsequential.

Yet, God's promise to make all things new (Rev. 21:5) is a vision of the future that cannot be taken away. God goes as far to promise that he is so powerful and so loving that even the worst things that ever happened to us will only result in our God and God's eternal glory (Rom. 8:28). This is a firm future vision that holds true even if the addict's life now seems to be nothing but teeth clenching work and pain.

Finally, all the preceding and antecedent steps in the order of salvation give the individual Christian confidence to persevere intentionally and energetically with the work of sanctification. Knowing, as previously mentioned, that it is God's will that they accomplish this task (1 Thess. 4:3-8) and He will empower and guide them through it. Sanctification is the step in the order of salvation that has the most parallels with the recovery models because it directly deals with the individual's current behavior.

One of the most common images of sanctification used by the Apostle Paul is the idea of putting on or taking off clothing (Eph. 4:22-24 and Col. 3:9-10). Paul paints the picture of removing a soiled garment that represents many evil acts but especially sexual immorality. He

then counsels the individual to put on the new self or new garment that is many good behaviors and ways of thinking that are in accordance with the works and character of Jesus.

The Bible is clear that this process does not automatically happen when an individual becomes a Christian but requires intense self-examination and intentionality (1 Cor. 11:28, 2 Cor. 13:5, Lam. 3:40, Ps. 4:4). However, the examination also requires an outside perspective because the Bible acknowledges that “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it,” (Jer. 17:9). This means that in addition to self-examination, the individual Christian is also commanded to have two other parties involved in examining their heart: God and the other believers.

The Psalms especially are replete with prayers to God to examine and test the supplicant’s heart and to root out any evil that lies therein (Ps. 139:24, 26:2). In addition, the Christian is supposed to do the work of sanctification within a community of other believers who are to meet regularly to worship God, encourage one another to do God, and encourage one another to stop behaviors that do not align with the character of God (Col. 3:16, Heb. 10:24-25, Eph. 5:19). These features are all mirrored within the various recovery models. They all require diligent self-examination both individually and in community.

Step 4 of the 12-steps states that the addict must make a “searching and fearless moral inventory.”¹⁶⁹ Then, Step 5 has the addict sharing that inventory with the higher power and their sponsor (a type of guide and mentor through the steps) and Step 10 counsels the recovering addict to take an inventory of themselves daily to put off harmful and destructive actions and thoughts and to pursue healthy thoughts and behaviors.

¹⁶⁹ John Baker, *Growing in Christ While Helping Others*, 11.

The CHOICE recovery model also breaks the behavioral change process into two parts. The “O” stands for overcoming compulsive behaviors and involves identifying the problem behavior and formulating a plan to stop the harmful behavior and replace it with a helpful behavior.¹⁷⁰ This is an obvious parallel to the “putting off” aspect of sanctification. Then the “I” stands for Identify positive sexuality and, as described previously, the biblical vision of sexuality is holistic and comprehensive. Choice also highly encourages the recovering addict to connect with others, which is the second “C” in CHOICE.

Finally, the TINSA model (as previously mentioned), encourages the addict to get involved in a recovery group because true connection and vulnerability with others is a major component in the addict’s recovery.¹⁷¹ Also, the model teaches the addict, from a neurological perspective, how to retrain the mind away from negative thoughts and actions and to embrace more healthy ways of thinking and behaviors.¹⁷²

The end goal of both recovery and the order of salvation is an individual who is confident, joyful, emotionally regulated, and capable of both spiritual and physical intimacy.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The preceding argument sought to demonstrate that modern research into pornography addiction and addiction recovery—when compared to the biblical doctrines regarding sexual activity, sin, and redemption—provide a holistic apologetic for the reliability of biblical doctrine as a whole and the Gospel specifically.

¹⁷⁰ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 128-129.

¹⁷¹ Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 128.

¹⁷² Barta, *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*, 129-130.

First, a proper foundation was laid by sketching a brief history of pornography in the modern era and by also providing a definition for pornography. The generic definition provided by the dictionary served well because its vagueness allowed it to be applied to many different types of media: *Merriam-Webster* defined pornography as “the depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement.”¹⁷³

Many different historical threads came together to make modern internet pornography both possible and widespread. The scientific thread woven by individuals like Alfred Kinsey and Sigmund Freud used biological and psychological terminology to state that sexual behavior was morally neutral and that all individuals were sexual from birth.¹⁷⁴ The thread of marketing and business was held by the likes of Hugh Hefner who made pornography more socially acceptable by combining it with skillfully conducted interviews with prominent individuals.¹⁷⁵ The thread of technology, including the development of the internet and handheld internet capable devices, demonstrated that pornography of almost any conceivable type and intensity is available at the tap of a button.

After the history of pornography was expounded, the magnitude of how widespread the use of pornography has become was demonstrated through a series of statistical analyses. Some of the most revealing and important statistics for the purpose of the argument were that 46% of men surveyed (between the ages of eighteen to thirty-nine) admitted to viewing pornography in the last week. Some 56% admitted to viewing it in the last month. Women were also surveyed, and 16% of 18- to 39-year-olds responded that they had viewed pornography in the last week and

¹⁷³ “Pornography Definition & Meaning,” in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, n.d. Accessed May 28, 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pornography>.

¹⁷⁴ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 188.

¹⁷⁵ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 179.

26% in the last month.¹⁷⁶ This level of regular usage of sexually explicit material is astounding, and an even more jarring statistic is that 10% of Americans are most likely compulsively using pornography to the point of being addicted.¹⁷⁷ Also, church-goers were shown to be using pornography to a similar level as the rest of society.¹⁷⁸

Once the widespread usage of pornography was demonstrated, the question of the effects of pornography addiction on an individual was addressed. It was shown that pornography impacts every area of an individual's life including physiological consequences like damaging neurological changes to the limbic system¹⁷⁹ and sexual dysfunction.¹⁸⁰ All of these impacts are exacerbated by the fact that 41% of addicts start using pornography before the age of twelve when their brain is still developing.¹⁸¹

It was also shown that pornography damages the individual psychologically. This takes place because addicts use pornography to numb their negative emotions instead of developing a healthy coping method. A full description of the addiction cycle explained how the addict used pornography to cope with negative emotions. Each phase was explained and discussed including the Dormant Phase, Trigger, Preparation, Acting Out, Regret, and Reconstitution.

¹⁷⁶ Mark Regnerus, David Gordon, and Joseph Price, "Documenting Pornography Use in America," 873–881.

¹⁷⁷ Patrick J. Carnes and Kenneth M. Adams, *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*, 427.

¹⁷⁸ Chisholm and Gall, *Shame and the X-Rated Addiction*, 262.

¹⁷⁹ Brian Park et al., "Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions?" 9

¹⁸⁰ Brian Park et al., "Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions?" 17.

¹⁸¹ Paula Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 38.

It was also explained how the addict slipped deeper into shame, depression, self-alienation, suicidal thoughts, and others.^{182 183 184} Moreover, it was demonstrated that pornography damages the individual socially—especially in the relationships closest to the addict, such as a spouse or children. Finally, it was explained that pornography also damages the addict spiritually. Addicts, fueled by their shame, often isolate themselves from their faith communities and even disrupt their relationship with God.¹⁸⁵

Evil actions and behaviors are never original, but always derivative. Money, power, sex, food, and relaxation are all good things created by God for the good of humanity. However, when they become corrupted, they turn into bad business practices, cheating, lying, hatred, murder, and gluttony. Sex, although treated as a danger by medieval theologians, is one of the most powerful and wonderful creations that God ever made. Therefore, when corrupted, it becomes an incredibly powerful evil.¹⁸⁶

The next step in the argument revolved around explaining the biblical doctrine of sexuality. In short, where sex came from and what its purpose was discussed. It was shown that God created sex for pleasure (Pro. 5:18-19), marital love and consummation (Gen. 2:23–24), and procreation (Gen. 1:28). This view of sex placed it as one of the greatest goods ever created by God as compared to the stripped down and commodified version available through pornography.

¹⁸² Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, Ch 1: The Addiction Cycle.

¹⁸³ Brené Brown, “Shame Resilience Theory: A Grounded Theory Study on Women and Shame,” *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 87, no. 1 (2006): 45.

¹⁸⁴ Carnes and Adams, *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*, 130.

¹⁸⁵ Chisholm and Gall, “Shame and the X-Rated Addiction,” 263.

¹⁸⁶ C. S. Lewis, “Mere Christianity,” in *The C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (CA: Harper Collins, 2002). 48

The significant difference between the corruption of pornography and the beauty of the Christian teaching about sex was made even more obvious when the qualities of biblical sex were explained. According to scripture, sex was designed by God to be personal, exclusive between a man and woman in marriage, intimate, fruitful, selfless, complex, and complementary. This is directly opposite to pornography, which is often anonymous, inclusive, detached, fruitless, self-centered, simple, and stripped down.

In short, pornography is the ultimate expression of sex that has been completely unanchored from God's design, as described in the Bible. C.S. Lewis could've been describing the corruption of modern internet pornography when he pointed out that,

We have engineered a great increase in the license which society allows to the representation of the apparent nude (not the real nude) in art, and its exhibition on the stage or the bathing beach. It is all a fake, or course; the figures in the popular art are falsely drawn; the real women in bathing suits or tights are actually pinched in and propped up to make them to appear firmer and more slender and more boyish than nature allows a full-grown woman to be. Yet at the same time, the modern world is taught to believe that it is being "frank" and "healthy" and getting back to nature. As a result [they] are more and more directing the desires of men to something which does not exist-making the role of the eye in sexuality more and more important and at the same time making its demands more and more impossible.¹⁸⁷

All of the information was then woven into a holistic apologetic for the reliability of the Bible. Two specific tapestries were woven. One showing that the addiction cycle in many ways closely parallels what the Bible teaches about temptation and sin, and the other demonstrated that successful addiction recovery closely mirrors what the Bible teaches about the redemption that all people need from their sins.

First, the addiction cycle was compared to the teachings of scripture around sin and temptation with James 1:12-17 being an anchor passage for the comparison. As previously

¹⁸⁷ C. S. Lewis, "The Screwtape Letters," in *The C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (CA: Harper Collins, 2002). 243.

mentioned, the addiction cycle contains six phases: dormant, trigger, preparation, acting out, regret, and reconstitution.¹⁸⁸ James has a similar cycle, or progression, that can be listed as being lured or enticed by desire, conception and pregnancy, sin, and death. The Bible's teaching not only contains all the important aspects of the addiction cycle, but also expounds even more information about the spiritual reality behind the physical behavior.

Furthermore, it was shown how successful addiction recovery closely parallels the biblical teaching around redemption and salvation. Addiction research has recently shown that a person can stop a negative behavior but not actually fix the root of the problem. To achieve true recovery, the addict must dig deep into their own emotions and past to discover why they view pornography. Finding healing for the underlying trauma or pain or negative coping skills will move the addict towards true recovery and a life worth living.

Similarly, Jesus taught that the outward behavior was not the true problem, but the heart of a person was. The Bible goes on to teach that the heart cannot be truly changed except through being redeemed by God himself. This process of redemption, often called the order of salvation, was then shown to closely mirror what modern addiction research has discovered about the best way for addicts to recover from addiction. Specifically, the CHOICE, TINSAs, and 12-Step models of recovery were compared to the order of salvation, and once again, the biblical teaching was demonstrated to contain all the pertinent parts of the secular addiction recovery models as well as the spiritual realities behind the physical aspects.

¹⁸⁸ Hall, *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction*, 52-58.

Bibliography

- Baker, John. *Stepping Out of Denial into God's Grace: Participant's Guide, 1*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Barta, Michael. *TINSA®: A Neurological Approach to the Treatment of Sex Addiction*. North Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018.
- Baribeau, Danielle A and Evdokia Anagnostou. "Oxytocin and Vasopressin: Linking Pituitary Neuropeptides and Their Receptors to Social Neurocircuits." *Frontiers in Neuroscience* 9, no. 335 (September 2015): 2.
- Birchard, Thaddeus, and Joanna Benfield. *Routledge International Handbook of Sexual Addiction*. New York: Routledge, 2018.
- Brown, Brené. "Shame Resilience Theory: A Grounded Theory Study on Women and Shame." *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 87, no. 1 (2006): 43–52.
- Blomberg, Craig L., Mariam J. Kovalishyn and Clinton E. Arnold. *James*. Grand Rapids: Harper Collins, 2008.
- Carnes, Patrick J., and Kenneth M. Adams. *Clinical Management of Sex Addiction*. New York: Routledge, 2020.
- Carnes, Patrick. *Out of the Shadows*. Center City: Hazelden Information & Edu, 2001.
- Chisholm, Myles, & Terry L. Gall. "Shame and The X-rated Addiction: The Role of Spirituality in Treating Male Pornography Addiction." *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 22, no. 4 (2015): 259-272.
- Clinton, Tim, and Eric Scalise. *Addictions and Recovery Counseling: 40 Topics, Spiritual Insights, and Easy-to-Use Action Steps*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013. Accessed September 9, 2021.
- Deslauriers, Marguerite. *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Editors of Encyclopaedia, Britannica. "Alfred Kinsey." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., August 21, 2021. Last modified August 21, 2021. Accessed May 28, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alfred-Charles-Kinsey>.
- Schaeffer, Francis. *True Spirituality*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001.
- Schaeffer, Francis. *The Church Before the Watching World: A Practical Ecclesiology*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974.

- Grudem, Wayne A. *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019.
- “H3045 - Yāda’ - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (ESV).” *Blue Letter Bible*. Accessed May 30, 2022. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3045/esv/wlc/0-1/>.
- Hall, Paula. *Sex Addiction: A Guide for Couples and Those Who Help Them*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019.
- _____. *Understanding and Treating Sex and Pornography Addiction: A Comprehensive Guide for People Who Struggle with Sex Addiction and Those Who Want to Help Them*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019.
- Helm, Paula. “Sobriety versus Abstinence, How 12-Steppers Negotiate Recovery Across Groups,” *Addiction Research and Theory*, 27, no. 1 (2019): 29-36
- Heimbach, Daniel R. *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004.
- Henry, Matthew. *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Hendrickson, 1991.
- Hill, Andrew E., and John H. Walton. *A Survey of The Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- Hollinger, Dennis P. *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.
- Kinsey, Alfred. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1953.
- Kinsey, Alfred C., Wardell Baxter Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin, and Sam Sloan. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1948.
- Lewis, C. S. *The C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2002.
- Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 200.
- “Pornography Definition & Meaning.” *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Accessed May 28, 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pornography>.
- Park, Brian, Gary Wilson, Jonathan Berger, Matthew Christman, Bryn Reina, Frank Bishop, Warren Klam, and Andrew Doan. “Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions? A Review with Clinical Reports.” *Behavioral Sciences* 6, no. 3 (2016): 17.
- Perry, Samuel L. “Not Practicing what You Preach: Religion and Incongruence between Pornography Beliefs and Usage.” *The Journal of Sex Research* 55, no. 3 (2018): 369–380.

Regnerus, Mark, David Gordon, and Joseph Price. "Documenting Pornography Use in America: A Comparative Analysis of Methodological Approaches." *The Journal of Sex Research* 53, no. 7 (2015): 873–881.

Trueman, Carl R. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020. Accessed September 23, 2021.

Weiss, Doug, Ted Roberts, and Timothy Jennings. "Conquer Series." Directed by Jeremy Wiles. Kingdom Works Studios, 2013. Accessed 2022.
https://web.soulrefiner.com/watching?id=0&group_uid=156104b2-a59a-43cf-ab2f-47ddc375e251&episode=3.

Willoughby, Brain J, Galena Rhoades, and Jason Carrol. Rep. *The Porn Gap: How Is Pornography Impacting the Relationships Between Men and Women Today*. Provo: The Wheatley Institute, 2021.