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***Virtual Intimacy and Pseudo Sexuality: The Effect of Pornography on the Self and on Relationships within the Family***

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**Introduction<sup>2</sup>**

All societies are highly sexualized, and Christian societies channeled that sexualization for the good of the child, society and the future.

Every society is confronted with the choice of whether to live their sexuality pro-creatively and relationally or in a utilitarian fashion, that is for the pleasure of the adults only. Stable societies keep their high sexual energies channeled into marriage, thus protecting the child and subsequent generations, and civilizing their men and women in the process. In all such societies, however, some youth, arriving at puberty, try to test the limits on sexual expression but often find severe sanctions confronting them immediately. Today, however, we live in a media-soaked society where the socializing dynamics of the past are increasingly beyond the control of most adults because of the digital revolution, causing concern, not just on the conservative side of the public discourse but, increasingly, also on the more liberal side, as two recent and significant reports make obvious, one by the American Psychological Association on the hyper-sexualization of girls and the other by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy on the content of phone texting among teenagers and young adults.<sup>3</sup>

In 2001 among 15 to 17 year olds in the U.S. 83 percent had Internet access in their homes and 29 percent in their bedrooms,<sup>4</sup> and averaged almost an hour per day (>48 minutes) in “recreational” Internet activities.<sup>5</sup>

Although U.S. adolescents indicate that their preferred source of sexual information is parents, more than half of them report that they have learned about intercourse,

pregnancy and birth control from television, and half of teenage young women report that they learned about sex from magazines.<sup>6 7</sup>

- 25.3 percent used online sexual activity to educate themselves
- 9.1 percent used online sexual activity to get support with sexual matters.
- 11.7 percent used online sexual activity to meet people to date.<sup>8</sup>
- 16.1 percent used online sexual activity to meet people with whom they could have offline sexual activities.<sup>9</sup>

## The Demographics of the Internet

In a study that tracked those introduced to the internet for the first time, the novices in the study tended to visit music websites, web services, search engines, pornography and group websites most frequently. As the novelty of the Internet wore off, the number of websites visited decreased, with pornography websites becoming relatively unpopular by the end of the first year.<sup>10</sup>

63 percent of American adults went online in 2003<sup>11 12</sup> with 20-33 percent going online for sexual purposes,<sup>13</sup> and of that portion who viewed pornography regularly in 2005, Nielsen research found that one in seven were teenagers or younger.<sup>14</sup>

## Mostly Unwanted in the Beginning

Most U.S. parents (78 percent) are worried about their adolescent accessing Internet pornography.<sup>15</sup> Not all teenagers readily take to this sexualized culture and most start out being ill at ease with any display of pornography. Numbers vary by country, but anywhere from 33 percent to 90 percent of youth aged 15 to 17 reported accidentally coming across pornography online.<sup>16 17 18</sup>

About one quarter of these youth said this happens “somewhat or very” often.<sup>19</sup> In 2007 thirty-four percent of adolescents reported unwanted Internet pornography exposure,<sup>20</sup> though some international studies put this number as high as 90 percent for overseas countries.<sup>21</sup>

Teenagers who watch pornography more frequently tend to be high sensation seekers, less satisfied with their lives, have a fast internet connection, and—significantly—have friends that were predominantly younger.<sup>22</sup>

Boys tend to seek pornography initially because they are curious or want sexual arousal,<sup>23</sup> while girls tend first to go to pornographic sites for sexual health or relationship-related information.<sup>24</sup>

In the beginning of exposure to pornography youth tend to be upset or embarrassed,<sup>25</sup> with reactions ranging from fear, shame, anger and lust.<sup>26 27</sup> About a quarter are “very”

upset by this exposure,<sup>28</sup> but they tend not to report it.<sup>29</sup> These initial reactions dissipate rapidly with repeated exposure, eventually vanishing entirely,<sup>30</sup> and give way, instead, to unadulterated reactions of enjoyment.<sup>31 32</sup> And viewers who masturbated while viewing sexually explicit material assessed the material more favorably than those who did not masturbate.<sup>33</sup>

## **The Intentional Pornographic Viewer**

The Internet and cable TV are the most common sources of pornography for intentional users.<sup>34</sup> Older adolescents used sexually explicit Internet material more often than younger adolescents did,<sup>35</sup> and twice as often as younger children.<sup>36 37</sup> Males seem to use pornography approximately five<sup>38</sup> to seven times<sup>39</sup> more frequently<sup>40</sup> than females and to be more exposed to it.<sup>41 42</sup>

Sexual media have different meanings and impacts on girls and boys, with males reporting more positive memories of sexually explicit material than females.<sup>43</sup> Male adolescents had more positive attitudes toward uncommitted sexual encounters, the more pornography they used.<sup>44 45</sup> And the younger they were the greater the impact.<sup>46</sup> In one study, those who watched the highest sexual content on TV greatly increased their sexual activity in the next year and doubled the likelihood they would initiate intercourse.<sup>47</sup>

## **Consequences of Viewing Pornography**

### *Social Relations*

Pornography viewing among teenagers has consequences that disorient them right where they are most vulnerable: their own uncertainty about their sexual beliefs and values,<sup>48</sup> which affects younger adolescents more than older adolescents,<sup>49</sup> and male adolescents slightly more than female adolescents.<sup>50</sup> Sexually explicit Internet material significantly increases this teenage lack of confidence.<sup>51</sup>

A high consumption of pornography by adolescents is associated with sexual intercourse with non-romantic friends,<sup>52</sup> and is likely a correlate of the “hooking-up” culture. However, pornography users quickly get negative feedback from their partners in the form of increased problems and complaints about their real life relationships.<sup>53</sup> Given that finding it is logical that a very significant relationship (explaining 45.9 percent of the variance) has been found between frequent pornography use and feelings of loneliness.<sup>54</sup>

### *In Marriage*

Pornography use undermines marital relations and distresses wives much more than girlfriends,<sup>55</sup> for wives see it as threatening the family.<sup>56</sup> Husbands report loving their spouses less after long periods of looking at (and desiring) the unnaturally beautiful models frequently depicted in pornography.<sup>57</sup>

“Women commonly report feelings of betrayal, loss, mistrust, devastation, and anger as responses to the discovery or disclosure of a partner’s pornography use and/or online

sexual activity,”<sup>58</sup> and they are often repulsed by it.<sup>59</sup> The distress level in wives is generally so high it needs to be treated by clinicians as trauma, not discomfort.<sup>60</sup>

While pornography viewers assign increased importance to sexual relations without emotional involvement,<sup>61</sup> the reality for the women involved (married, engaged, or girlfriends) is decreased intimacy.<sup>62 63</sup> When the viewing of pornography rises to the level of addiction, 40 percent of “sex-addicts” lose their spouse, 58 percent suffer severe financial losses, and about a third lose their job.<sup>64</sup>

In one study, more than half (52 percent) of the cybersex users lost interest in sexual intercourse, as had one-third of their partners, and in 18 percent of the relationships surveyed, both partners had a decreased interest in sexual intercourse.<sup>65</sup>

Prolonged exposure to pornography also fosters dissatisfaction with an intimate partner’s affection,<sup>66</sup> while cynical attitudes about love begin to emerge, and “superior sexual pleasures” are thought attainable without affection toward partners.<sup>67</sup> These consequences hold for both men and women who have prolonged exposure to pornography with the decline in sexual happiness primarily due to the growing dissatisfaction with the partner’s changed sexual behavior.<sup>68</sup>

For pornography users the institution of marriage is increasingly seen as sexually confining,<sup>69</sup> which in turn diminishes the importance of faithfulness,<sup>70</sup> spawns doubts about the value of marriage as an essential social institution and its future viability,<sup>71</sup> and, given all of that, naturally leads to a diminishment of the importance of good family relations.<sup>72</sup>

No wonder then that other family risks are involved, with many finding that raising children and having a family has become an unattractive prospect,<sup>73</sup> especially for females<sup>74</sup>—findings which *might* be a major factor in the noticeable increase in intended childlessness, such as the finding that 30 percent of German adults (18 to 39) intend to be childless, while a further 15 percent are uncertain.<sup>75</sup>

#### *Infidelity differences among men and women*

A steady use of pornography not infrequently leads to abandonment of the goal of marital fidelity among the young,<sup>76</sup> and with the probability of such infidelity is increased 3.18 times among adults.<sup>77</sup> The emotional distance that pornography fosters can often be just as damaging to the relationship as real-life infidelity,<sup>78</sup> and both men and women tend to put online sexual activity in the same category as having an affair.<sup>79</sup>

In a study of self-identified female internet sex-addicts, women reported preferring sex within the context of a relationship or at least e-mail or chat room interactions rather than by accessing images. And this preference made a significant difference: For a much greater proportion of women than men (80 percent vs. 33.3 percent), their online sexual activities led to real-life sexual encounters, even though a similar proportion of men and women engaged in online sex with another person (email/chat room).<sup>80</sup>

These men and women experienced depression and other emotional problems, social isolation, worsening of their sexual relationship with their spouse or partner, harm done to their marriage or primary relationship, exposure of children to online pornography or masturbation, career loss or decreased job performance, other financial and, in some cases, legal consequences.<sup>81</sup>

Although some therapists, consulted by the participants in this study in the year 2000, were very helpful, other therapists were uninformed about the nature and extent of sexual activities available online and reportedly (1) minimized the significance of the cybersex behavior and did not accept it for the powerful addiction it was, (2) failed to make it a priority to stop illegal or self-destructive behaviors, and (3) did not consider the effect of the cybersex involvement on the spouse or partner.<sup>82</sup>

### *Divorce*

Not surprisingly pornography addiction is a major contributor to separation and divorce.<sup>83</sup> In the best study to date, 68 percent of divorce cases involved one party meeting a new love interest over the Internet, 56 percent involved one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites, 47 percent involved spending excessive time on the computer, and 33 percent involved spending excessive time in chat rooms (a commonly sexualized forum).<sup>84</sup>

## **Impacts of Pornography on the Development of Children and Young Adults**

The impacts on young children are varied, nasty and numerous.

First and foremost is the pervading loss of the natural social nutrient for a growing child, the warmth of affectionate family life. Other losses and traumas include:

- decreased parental time and attention (from the pornography addicted parent and from the parent preoccupied with the addicted spouse);
- encountering pornographic material a parent has acquired;
- encountering a parent masturbating;
- overhearing a parent engaged in phone sex;
- increased risk of parental separation and divorce;
- increased risk of parental job loss and financial strain;
- increased risk of the children consuming pornography themselves;
- exposure to the objectification of human beings, especially women;
- witnessing and/or being involved in parental conflict; and
- witnessing and/or experiencing stress in the home related to online sexual activities.<sup>85</sup>

Parents struggling with this sexual problem are more likely to disclose it in some fashion to their children once the child is ten years of age or older, thereby distorting the sexual development of the child involved.<sup>86</sup>

***Psychological Consequences: Desensitization, Habituation & Boredom***

Prolonged consumption of pornography eventually produces sexual and, more generally, excitatory habituation<sup>87</sup> as well as boredom, and it fosters sexual dissatisfaction among both male and female viewers,<sup>88</sup> leading to more lenient views of extramarital sex, recreational attitudes toward sex, and stronger notions of women as sex objects.<sup>89</sup>

A 2000 study of college freshmen found that habituation to pornography led naturally to tolerance of sexually explicit material, requiring more novel or bizarre material to achieve the same level of arousal or interest.<sup>90</sup>

Repeated exposure to pornography prompted respondents to consider engaging in “recreational sex” as important,<sup>91</sup> and to be very accepting of sexual permissiveness.<sup>92 93</sup> These changes are exacerbated by another change, one already noted above for married men: men perceive their mates as sexually less attractive,<sup>94</sup> resulting in less satisfaction specifically with their partner’s affection, physical appearance, sexual curiosity, and sexual performance.<sup>95</sup>

Habituation leads to ever worsening outcomes, including:

- watching depictions of group sex, sadomasochistic practices, and sexual contact with animals;<sup>96</sup>
- engaging in oral sex and anal intercourse;<sup>97 98</sup> and
- trivializing nonviolent forms of the sexual abuse of children.<sup>99</sup>

No wonder that in a study of addicted men 43 percent used online sexual activity (OSA) to engage in sexual activities they would never perform in their normal real life.<sup>100</sup> After prolonged exposure, men and also women, trivialize rape and tend to deem it a non-criminal offense.<sup>101</sup>

***Psychological Consequences: Cognitive distortion of the perception of reality***

Prolonged exposure to erotica leads to distortions of social realities:

- to a perception of exaggerated sexual activity being present in the general populace;<sup>102</sup>
- to inflated estimates of the incidence of premarital and extramarital sexual activity;
- to inflated assessments of male and female promiscuity;<sup>103</sup>
- to an overestimation of almost all sexual activities performed by sexually active adults;<sup>104</sup>
- and to an overestimation of the prevalence of less common sexual practices (e.g., group sex, bestiality, sadomasochistic activity, and sex with children).<sup>105</sup>

All these distortions amount to a most serious misreading and mis-education about sexuality and relationships, and is a dangerous distortion of social politics.<sup>106</sup>

And these tendencies happen, not just as a result of viewing pornography, but also from frequent exposure to soap operas among females and music videos among males,<sup>107</sup> both leading to a perception of promiscuity as a normal state of interaction among the sexes.<sup>108</sup> To make the distortion even more debilitating, the unfortunate woman who views pornography regularly develops a negative body image of herself.<sup>109</sup>

These distortions deepen with continued use: Prolonged exposure to pornography fosters and strengthens not only the belief that promiscuous behavior is healthy, but also that sexual repression constitutes a health risk.<sup>110</sup> Other attitude changes among the young (as in the older, covered above) include a diminished trust in intimate partners; and the abandonment of hope of sexual exclusivity between partners.<sup>111</sup>

### ***Psychological Consequences: Cognitive distortion of social and relational reality***

Prolonged exposure leads to an overestimation of almost all sexual activities performed by sexually active adults<sup>112</sup> because sexual access is typically presented as relentless and exploitative, a sporting event that amounts to innocent fun (the object is to score), and that it is inconsequential in its effects on emotions and health.<sup>113</sup> All this results in an internal endorsement of three key stereotypes:

- sexual relationships are recreational in nature;
- men are generally sexually driven; and
- women are sex-objects.<sup>114</sup>

These are results are called “Permission-Giving Beliefs,” cognitions which make one’s behavior normal, acceptable, commonplace to oneself, while not being hurtful to anyone else.<sup>115</sup> The favorableness of these beliefs is deepened by masturbation while viewing pornography,<sup>116</sup> a practice frequent among those who use online pornography to deal with stress.<sup>117</sup>

To further compound these distortions and make help less likely, both male and female viewers do not believe that exposure to pornography on the web has any effect upon their personal views or lives,<sup>118</sup> thus facilitating the internalizing of abnormal sexual attitudes and increasing the likelihood that they will engage in perverse sexual behaviors.<sup>119</sup>

## **Clinical Consequences**

### ***Depression***

Teenage girls who have had sexual intercourse are three times more likely to be depressed than their friends who are still virgins, while boys are more than twice as likely to report depression.<sup>120</sup> Learning that they have become infected with an STD adds to higher rates of depression.<sup>121</sup> Sexually active girls are three times more likely to have

attempted suicide as their virgin peers, and sexually active boys are seven times more likely to have attempted suicide.<sup>122</sup> (1.3 percent actually attempted suicide.<sup>123</sup>) Among compulsive male sex addicts, close to a third are significantly depressed.<sup>124</sup>

### ***STDs and out of wedlock pregnancy***

The culture of non-marital sex is dedicated to avoidance of pregnancy and disease, but the use of pornography is quite disruptive of these goals, because its frequent depiction of intercourse without condoms (87 percent of the time) is an invitation to contract an STD.<sup>125</sup> Thus frequent exposure to pornography leads to:

- multiple sex partners,
- neglect of contraception [among those intending neither marriage nor child birth],<sup>126</sup> and
- pregnancy rates two times greater among those who view high levels of televised sexual content compared to those who view low levels.<sup>127 128</sup>

### ***Sexual Compulsions***

A 2006 Swedish study of regular pornography users found that about six percent were sexually compulsive (or addicted) and that these compulsives use much more non-internet pornography as well.<sup>129</sup> In the U.S., 56.5 percent of frequent viewers used online sexual activity to deal with stress,<sup>130</sup> a practice that increases their risk of engendering a sexual compulsion.<sup>131</sup>

### ***Callousness, Aggression and Force***

Among frequent viewers, there is marked evidence of increased callousness, including accepting the rape myth (that women really want to be forced to have sexual relations and enjoy it more when they are so forced),<sup>132 133 134</sup> markedly so for men.<sup>135</sup>

Counter intuitively this is less pronounced after exposure to violent pornography than after exposure to non-coercive erotica,<sup>136</sup> though there is some conflicting data on this.<sup>137</sup> From a recent forensic psychiatry study we know that children who had become sexual predators before the age of 12, all had not only experienced pornographic material on the Internet, but a large proportion believed that was the only purpose of the Internet.<sup>138</sup>

Though there have been attempts to make much of it, the data suggest that there is only a modest connection between exposure to pornography and subsequent behavioral aggression.<sup>139</sup> However when the consumers of pornography depicting violence (e.g., rape or torture) are men who are at high risk for sexual aggression (prior impulsivity, hostility towards women, and promiscuity), the rates of sexual aggression increase. Similar findings hold for youth<sup>140</sup>

In one study, sex offenders were more aroused than non-criminals while viewing pornographic material and also were more aroused by violent sex than were non-criminals. In contrast, sex offenders were less aroused by depictions of consensual sex than the non-criminal population.<sup>141</sup>

Behaviorally, psychotic men are strongly affected by violent pornography in their inclination to act out their impulses, whereas men with minimal psychotic inclination are not.<sup>142</sup>

Consumption of common, nonviolent pornography, but not of violent pornography, was found to increase men's self-acknowledged willingness to force compliance with their particular sexual desires on reluctant partners.<sup>143</sup>

Though there is conflicting data on the relative effects of violent vs. non-violent pornography,<sup>144</sup> there is little doubt that the consumption of nonviolent and violent pornography leads to:

- a significant increase in accepting the rape myth (that women really enjoy being forced to have sexual intercourse);<sup>145</sup>
- a short term reduction of sympathy with victims of rape;
- trivializing rape as a criminal offense;<sup>146</sup>
- diminishing concern about sexual child abuse, short of the rape of children;<sup>147</sup> and
- increasing men's self-acknowledged preparedness to resort to rape.<sup>148</sup>

## The Neurological Substrate and Neurotransmitters

We know that physical exercise alters the brain structurally.<sup>149</sup> We know that neural pathways are laid down anew with repeated new behaviors, and the role of dopamine in laying down new pathways where pleasure is involved—food, sex, and drugs—is gradually being uncovered. We can say that “emotionally arousing images imprint and alter the brain, triggering an instant, involuntary, but lasting, biochemical memory trail”(Reisman).<sup>150</sup>

Sexual activity is one of the strongest generators of the dopamine response, a hormone so linked to pleasure that neuropsychologists call it a reward.<sup>151</sup>

Though dopamine's role in experiencing pleasure has been questioned by several researchers, the competing hypothesis, if true, would explain a lot of the effects of pornography. The dissenters argue that dopamine is more associated with anticipatory desire as opposed to the pleasure of sexual consummation, suggesting that “liking the representation of sexual activity” may be gradually dissociated from and made superior to “wanting sexual activity itself.” In fact, it seems that if the hormonal response associated with pornography becomes pathologically amplified, the user may *want the representation* of sexual activity more and more *while liking the activity* less and less as tolerance develops to the drug's pleasurable effects.

This hypothesis would explain the development of uncontrolled addictive behavior, which is not motivated by the original form of sexual pleasure and attraction value (an academic term for simple intercourse and lust) that caused the acquisition of the habit in the first place.<sup>152</sup>

Psychopharmacological research this year (2008) at Vanderbilt University, on the relationship between dopamine and aggression, led to the following conclusion: “We learned from these experiments that an individual will intentionally seek out an aggressive encounter solely because they experience a rewarding sensation from it [showing] for the first time that aggression, on its own, is motivating, and that the well-known positive reinforcer, dopamine, plays a critical role.”<sup>153</sup> Even non-sex addicts will show brain reactions on PET scans while viewing pornography similar to cocaine addicts looking at images of people taking cocaine.<sup>154</sup>

We know that adolescents involved in alcohol, marijuana, or tobacco abuse, are more likely to initiate sexual activity early and to have an increased number of sexual partners.<sup>155</sup> In other words they already have laid down pathways to dopamine pleasure rewards and are seeking it now in many places. They have become pleasure seekers, as in “Confessions of an English Opium Eater,” and can say with the author Thomas de Quincey:

“I can assure him that nobody will laugh long who deals much with opium: its pleasures even are of a grave and solemn complexion, and in his happiest state the opium-eater cannot present himself in the character of L’Allegro: even then he speaks and thinks as becomes Il Penseroso.”<sup>156</sup>

## **The Temptation to Addictions of Every Sort**

This paper has developed some of the issues in play when the desire for sexual pleasure is shaped in a wrong way by pornography, ending for some, in a debilitating addiction but weakening all who come close to it.

In our present age of material abundance, the probabilities of addictions to food, drink, depersonalized sexuality, drugs, and other addictions real and undeveloped, indicate the need for man to be aware of his fused biological and spiritual nature.

The first and grounding experiences of the spiritual for man is in being brought first into deep relationship with another – the mother – who brings the child then into relationship with others in the family (father and siblings) and thence to others in society, friends and extended family.

For the spiritual is found first and foremost in relationships. It is in close relationships that man’s spirituality is most frequently and most foundationally exercised and formed.

Think of the relationship that means most to you: it is real. You and your deepest friend know exactly how your relationship is doing (doing well, getting a little stale or growing in depth). When it goes wrong, you (body and spirit) are affected. When it is great, your whole self is affected. Yet you cannot measure it, touch it, weigh it, smell it, hear it, or see it. It is totally immaterial, for it is *between* both of you. It is spiritual.

Therein, I propose, lies man’s path to wholeness (and to God). These relationships, well lived, put the material dimension in its proper place and in the process reduce the

probabilities of addictions. Addictions are the fruit of a civilization we don't want to inhabit. They are denizens of a different planet, a non-relational planet.

And the data illustrate this: The closer adult men were to their fathers growing up, the fewer non-marital sexual behaviors they engage in and the greater their levels of marital happiness and family satisfaction.<sup>157</sup> The proportion of adolescents who rate their fathers as very close to them is highest among those from intact married families (40%) and lowest among those from single-parent families (3%).<sup>158</sup>

We at Family Research Council have found a similar intergenerational effect: adult children of intact parental marriages view X-rated material less than do the adult children of non-intact marriages, and the marriage of parents has a larger correlation with reduced viewing than does the adolescent children's levels of worship.<sup>159</sup> When the relational (the ordinary spiritual) is well cultivated, the bios and the spirit function in prosperous unity.

We know from Lauman et al.'s research<sup>160</sup> that monogamous women who worship weekly have the most frequent and the most enjoyable sexual relations. And from Robert Lerner's work, we know that satisfaction in communication is extraordinarily high among those who practice natural family planning (natural rational sexuality), and their level of satisfaction with their family life far exceeds that of the general population.<sup>161</sup>

These are small indications of what man needs (in the words and unique style of John Paul II):

“The experience of the human person, to experience which realizes the need to convert the sexual urge from an instinct directed to selfish pleasure, to a motive for building a loving relationship with another.”<sup>162</sup>

## **The Sexual Challenge to our Civilization: Choice between Two Alternate Routes**

*We now live in a chaotically sexualized society:*

Nearly 50 percent of United States high-school students have already had sexual intercourse<sup>163</sup> and on average will have already had three different sexual partners by graduation.<sup>164</sup> Seventy percent of female high school students and 55 percent of male high school students who have experienced sexual intercourse reported that they wish they had waited.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore twenty<sup>166</sup> to thirty percent of women of all ages report that their first sexual intercourse was not voluntary.<sup>167</sup>

Given all this, it is not surprising that 93 percent of teenagers think young people ought to receive a strong abstinence message.<sup>168</sup> The data confirm that those who remain abstinent until marriage have greater confidence in their future and actually go on to live more successful lives, as measured by education, economics, and emotional stability.<sup>169</sup> Human beings are healthiest and happiest when they are monogamous (only one sexual partner in a lifetime),<sup>170</sup> and that happiness is directly related to monogamy's long-term stability and exclusivity.<sup>171 172</sup>

*Today's youth are reaching puberty earlier, engaging in sexual intercourse sooner, but are get married significantly later.<sup>173</sup> Our society is on a collision course with human realities. In a more highly sexualized culture, with a longer pre-marriage period, our children need the capacity for continence if their marriages are to be stable. Engaged parents who limit, monitor, and direct their children's internet use provide an invaluable buffer to internet photography and allow room for a healthy sexuality to develop.*

*Western Christian Civilization has celebrated romantic love since at least the early Middle Ages, when it began to flower culturally with the troubadours. Romantic love is chaste, monogamous and faithful. There are certainly potential tragedies in pursuing romance and potential sufferings after having experienced it. There isn't a single young man or woman who is not attracted to that love (unless they've been depraved). The more examples they see of it, the more likely they are to pursue it*

*Given Roger Scruton's recent Cardinal Newman address<sup>174</sup> on the drift away from the personal engagement into the digital non-personal, non-social realm, and given Richard Weaver's stunningly prophetic chapter in the same vein on the coming effects of the "The Great Stereopticon" (television),<sup>175</sup> it behooves us to discipline the digital to appropriate service, and judge our success at this by the amount of extra time it frees us to enjoy family and friends. This is one of the ways to heaven, a preparation for it, and an anticipatory enjoyment of it here on Earth.*

## **Question and Revised Answers**

### **What does research tells us, as professionals, about using pornography as treatment?**

We have to decide what we want to do with our own and our clients' sexuality. Even the way I'm phrasing that is the wrong way. We are sexual beings. We will live our sexuality pro-creatively and relationally, or we will live it in a utilitarian way, use it for our own ends. Either we will work to unify our biological and spiritual dimensions or we will keep them separate. There are fundamental choices we have to make, as human beings and as therapists.

To use pornography is to maintain the dualist and utilitarian split, to use sexuality in a utilitarian fashion, for our pleasure not for its own ends. By contrast all of the great love stories unfold beautifully and in the unified way. Either we go with the unfolding and all

the work that entails, or we manipulate ourselves for selfish ends. This was the lesson of the almost-great love story “A Severe Mercy” by Sheldon Vanauken. As therapists we will lead our clients in one or other of these two sexual ways: procreative love or utilitarian pleasure masquerading as love.

**Because of the seriousness of the neurological component, how do you help somebody with those dopamine triggers, when that kicks in?**

Let us take a few steps back in order to get the context and the answer correct,

The more families use the internet together, the greater the chance children will have no difficulty keeping pornography at bay. If you still have a conscience or even just shame derived from modesty you don't look at this material in the company of others.

The family where the father looks at the internet occasionally and calls the son or daughter over to work with him, and where the children call the parents to look at what they are doing, that type of family engagement is a tremendous teacher. The greater there is love and affection between parents, a love and affection that includes the use of the computer, then the enjoyment of each other is both an end to be pursued for its own sake and the preventative that helps children and adults control themselves in computer use.

The digital can quickly become a master and we the slave rather than it being the tool and we being the masters. The computer brings with it the danger of driving out social relationships and substituting for that all sorts of artificial and digital images and constructs and data bits. This is an impoverishing trade-off.

Friendships are love, and computer images are matter, representing frequently a distorted, conceptualized, “remote” fantasy, especially when used as a substitute for friendship and time together. Thus the computer, even without pornography, presents a choice: to seek friendship or to seek a digital fantasy escape in which we live increasingly like hermits on an alien planet.

Now when the non-relational image dominates where the relational should, the desire for the image rather than the embrace of the loved one for love's sake (the same holds for alcohol or drugs) the relationship of persons is the first step back to sanity and reality. This first relationship is often in the person of the AA or SAA “buddy” whom one calls on when tempted, or the meetings where one deals openly in conversation with the group of other strugglers about the demons within, bringing them into the open-ness of relational support. And it is to be noted that the 12<sup>th</sup> step is that which most solidifies the recovery. And that 12<sup>th</sup> step is the generous gift of self to another who is struggling, when the one needing help becomes a helper to another in need of help.<sup>176</sup>

**Regarding previous research (in the 70's) that has shown that there wasn't a difference between how men and women responded to pornography (college students willing to view pornography). Has there been any ground shift since then? What is the history of that research?**

One big difference between then and now is the internet. What they were dealing with then was printed matter, mainly, and it seems that there were vested interests with links to the pornography industry pouring money into research.

One of the big differences in research findings between then and now are the findings on male and female presented above. What women are attracted to and why they get into pornography is different from what attracts men. Theirs is more "relationally" orientated, whereas men are simply direct pleasure oriented. But it is pornography and it has similar effects on both, despite different pathways thereto.

Also we are seeing that what is viewed and acted upon leaves its neurological footprint, making it hard for people to reverse their patterns. Increasingly there is a concordance between behavioral, neurological and clinical research in this field.

**What is the research showing the effect of our current culture on the senior citizen population? Dr. Ruth's views seem to be infiltrating health advocacy and sexual education for senior citizens. Research is encouraging sexuality in senior citizen centers and multiple partners. This shift toward our current culture's view of sex, is now being advocated for senior citizens who didn't grow up with that moral structure. Is any research being done on the impact it's having on them?**

Go back to Paul's interview with Felix in Acts 24, verse 25 and his description of one of the three defining characteristics of Christianity as chastity (from which the governor Felix fled in terror), and to the dictum that to be Christian, trying to be close to Christ is to pursue a life of chastity. Now clearly that is not Dr. Ruth's project. No, she is a dualist and a radical utilitarian in sexual matters, and getting old herself is quite aware of the sexual desires of the elderly. (I remember first hearing from an 80-year old celibate, and I think, very holy, priest that the sexual urge dies 20 minutes after we are in the grave. I have heard the same from many elderly men since.)

Clearly the sexualization of modernity is forcing us all to explore sexuality and its relationship to chastity and chastity's relationship to sexuality. Dr. Ruth has her way. We have ours. But there is a different urgency for the elderly. They are closer to the end of life and thus with less time to repair the damage done.

All crises have within them the seeds of potential growth. What the world needs to be able to see is Christians living sexuality in a very different way from the way the world lives it. When enough Christians are different in that way, where there are communities of people who are living out their sexuality in a way that is clearly and obviously Christian with all its accoutrements (romance, fidelity, monogamy, marriage, children,

non-contracepting). Then those following the utilitarian view can look over and say “See how they love one another and all the happiness that comes with it? Yes, they’re strange, but...I wish we had what they have.”

In the battle that is under way, one of the things we need tremendous confidence in is romance, which began to flower culturally with the troubadours in the early Middle Ages. Only in Christianity do you have that. Romance occurs for individuals around the world in all sorts of cultures but it was in the early middle ages that Christian culture flowered and with it romance premised on chastity, marriage, and love. (A significant number of these troubadours ended up pursuing a different and great romance: they joined monasteries and took vows of celibacy.)

Romance is almost at the apex of Western Christian civilization. In it we celebrate human love, but it’s chaste, monogamous, faithful love. That is what our great literature recounts, what our great operas and songs sing about, our poetry filigrees and our best dances embody. Remove romance from the arts of Western civilization and much that speaks to the heart is gone. Today we have much less romance in our art, songs, dances and music because chastity has been pushed out. With that flees true love, or the search for true love, for true love keeps itself for only one, the one to be loved for life.

There are all sorts of potential trials and sorrows on the way to attaining true love and potential sufferings after attaining it, but the young people have always wanted that and always will. There isn’t a single young man or woman who doesn’t want that, unless they’ve been deprived by awful parents.

That love is “ours”. It is the Christian way. If we live this way, more and more young people caught in the tide of pornography or tempted by its lifestyle, will say, “I want that.” But if they can’t see us, they can’t want it.

With pornography the choice gets clearer: the long-range Christian way of love or the world’s path made to use sexuality for short-term pleasure; life and love or pleasure and depression; belonging or alienation; the future in the child or death in self absorption.

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