

DIGITAL ENSLAVEMENT

Amidst The Search For Intimacy



Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.

**Center for Connected Living, LLC
Clinical Director, Holdfast Recovery**

ENDORSEMENTS

FOR TRANSGENDER CONFUSION AMIDST THE SEARCH FOR INTIMACY

“Digital Enslavement Amidst the Search for Intimacy” offers a critical exploration of pornography addiction's effects on individuals and society. Beginning with an overview of the addiction's severity, the book delves into the origins of such addiction, emphasizing digital pornography's accessibility. A notable section on the neuroscience behind addiction provides a solid scientific basis, explaining the biological challenges in overcoming this addiction.

Dr. Jeffrey Hansen thoroughly examines the impacts of pornography addiction, including its physical, mental, and societal consequences. Dr. Hansen highlights the troubling links between pornography, sexual aggression, and the objectification of women, presenting well-researched arguments and real-life examples. The discussion extends to the worrying trend of the sexualization of children, prompted by early exposure to pornography.

Concluding with a chapter on recovery and treatment options, “Digital Enslavement Amidst the Search for Intimacy” transitions from diagnosis to hopeful solutions, offering practical advice for those seeking to break free from pornography addiction. This concise

yet comprehensive guide combines scientific insight with empathetic advice, making it a valuable resource for a wide audience, including those affected by addiction, professionals, and concerned individuals. Its core message is one of hope: recovery is challenging but achievable through understanding, support, and determined effort.

Andrew P. Doan, MPH, MD, PhD

Adjunct Associate Professor of Surgery, Uniformed Services University
Ophthalmology and Aerospace Medicine

Sculpted to be comprehensively informative, yet also powerfully practical and encouraging, psychologist Jeffrey Hansen's Digital Enslavement Amidst The Search For Identity masterfully addresses a dark subject growing darker in the digital age.

Dr. Hansen draws from his life's work and past personal problem with porn to provide this highly readable resource that invites us to a revealing look at the issue, its causes and contributors, its spread, and a clear and well-defined avenue to recovery and continued freedom.

Digital Enslavement is replete with science, proven approaches, and wisdom. The seven-step U-turn path away from the porn-triggered activation sequence is among several offerings here worth the price of admission. Particularly bold is the chapter on Neo-Marxism and Queer theory, which, as you will find, is the philosophical launch pad for much of the modern problem. Far from being a relatively harmless pastime – and contrary to the stated position of certain ideologues in the mental health and sociological fields -- porn use is not benign. Pornography consumption worsens loneliness, depression, social integration, emotional health, conduct problems,

physical and sexual aggressiveness, respect for women, and spiritual health. Dr. Hansen's contribution is the single best work I have yet read on the topic. Consider obtaining a copy for yourself and for any loved one caught in the struggle.

Andre Van Mol, MD

Board-certified family physician

Co-chair, Council on Adolescent Sexuality, American College of Pediatricians

Co-chair, Sexual and Gender Identity Task Force, Christian Medical & Dental Assoc.

Digital Enslavement Amidst the Search for Intimacy offers insight, introspection and actionable strategies to aid individuals and providers along their journey with this addition. Dr. Hansen addresses how exposure to pornography deleteriously impacts the spheres of body, mind and soul. Dr. Hansen goes beyond describing how pornography affects our mental health by providing insight into the physical and spiritual issues many face today. He is quick to note shame and condemnation have no place in effective treatment and helps us to understand the disease model of pornography addiction. Secular or spiritual, the recent transactional attitude toward intimacy brought on by pornography has created huge rifts in individuals and families alike. Dr. Hansen provides a "road map" of exit strategies that if followed, may lift one out of the downward spiral caused by pornography addiction. If you or anyone you care about is struggling, Digital Enslavement Amidst the Search for Intimacy should be in your library.

Salvatore Bitondo, LMSW, BCD

Chief, Family Advocacy Program, Behavioral Health Services Lane
Madigan Army Medical Center

With special gratitude to Dr. Andre Van Mol for his belief in me and encouragement to reach higher and take greater risks to do what it takes to save our children. He inspires by word and leads by example, and his dedication to excellence in all he does has helped make this book all the more readable and, hopefully, useful.

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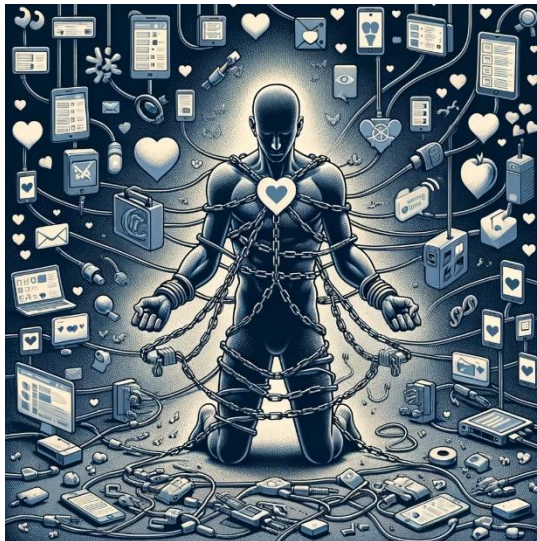
“The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy of the Defense Health Agency, the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.”

NO MEDICAL ADVICE IS GIVEN NOR IS PROVIDED IN THIS BOOK. SUCH INFORMATION WHICH MAY BE MEDICAL IN NATURE IS INFORMATION ONLY FOR THE USE OF LICENSED AND EXPERIENCED MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS. A READER INTERESTED IN MEDICAL ADVICE OR MEDICAL TREATMENT SHOULD CONSULT A MEDICAL PRACTITIONER WITH AN APPROPRIATE SPECIALTY WHO IS PROPERLY LICENSED IN THE READER'S JURISDICTION.

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INTRODUCTION



Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As to be hated needs but to be seen
Yet seen too oft, familiar, with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

-Alexander Pope's essay on man

In the words of Stephen Arterburn, world renowned expert on sexual addiction, *"I don't know of any plague to ever reach into the homes and families all over the world and create as much damage or heartaches than the struggle of lust, affairs,*

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pornography, perversion, and sexual addiction. It seems that everywhere I look, it gets worse and worse. The Internet exploded the problem, and now cell phones transport pornography more portably than the computer and facilitates affairs with greater accessibility and secrecy” (cited in Roberts, 2008, p.9).

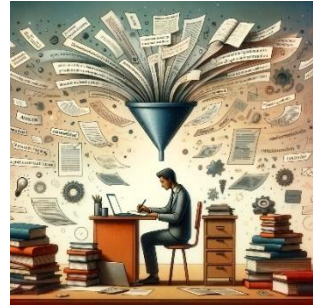
When I entered my profession in Pediatric Psychology some 35 years ago, I never would have guessed that I would be writing a paper on pornography addiction after seeing so many of my patients’ lives being derailed and even destroyed by the unsavory and soulless pornography industry. I have seen boys as young as 11 attempt to rape children as young as three after getting steamed up on porn, I have seen normal adolescent sexuality be hijacked and rewritten from something wonderful to something perverse, I have seen men go to jail and lose their careers, I have seen marriages fail – the toll is enormous and is mounting every day. The Utah state legislature has wisely declared pornography a national epidemic that is ripping the fabric of our society (Barta, 2018). As a result of these observations, I am writing this paper as a conversation to you, regardless of your age, gender, station in life, or career. You may or may not be struggling with pornography, but even if you aren’t, you undoubtedly know someone who is, and your knowledge of fact from fiction and how to become free can possibly save the mind, body, and soul of that person. I want you to know that I offer no judgement for those who struggle. I struggled with soft porn magazine addiction as a teen and as a young man, a problem that carried into my marriage, which it almost destroyed. I was lucky enough to have a wonderful wife who chose not to leave me and instead helped me engage in a life-saving therapy experience with a

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man who did not judge me and showed me the way out. I will forever be thankful and fully indebted to my wife and Dr. Ebye.

This paper will summarize my thoughts, as well as the work of some of the best seminal writers on this topic, who rightly deserve credit as noted below:



- **Barta, M.** (2018). *TINSA: Trauma Induced Sexual Addiction*. North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- **Canes, P., et al.,** (2007). *In the Shadows of the Net: Breaking Free of Compulsive Online Sexual Behavior*. Center City, MN: Hazelden Foundation.
- **Doan, A.** (2012). *Hooked on Games*. Coralville, IA: F.E.P. International, Inc.
- **Fradd, M.** (2017). *The Porn Myth: Exposing the Reality Behind the Fantasy of Pornography*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press.
- **Foubert, J.** (2017). *How Pornography Harms: What Today's Teens, Young Adults, Parents, and Pastors Need to Know*. Bloomington, IN: LifeRich Publishing.
- **Dines, G.** (2010). *Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- **Skinner, K.** (2005). *Treating Pornography Addiction: The Essential Tools for Recovery*. Lindon, UT: K. Skinner Corporation.

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- **Turner, A.** (2017). *Breaking the Feedback Loop: How I Liberated myself from Internet Addiction and you can too.* Lexington, KY: Phanarian II.
- **Zimbardo, P. and Coulombe, N.** (2016). *Man Interrupted.* Newburyport, MA: Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC.
- **Wilson, G.** (2014). *Your Brain on Porn.* UK: Commonwealth Publishing.

We should first, as the Jesuits say, define our terms. The word "pornography" comes from the Greek words, "**porne,**" meaning a harlot, prostitute, or whore, and "graphos," meaning a writing or depiction. If we put both words together, we arrive at "A depiction or description of the activities of whores" (Catholic News Agency). Webster elaborates to indicate that it also means "A depiction of licentiousness or lewdness," or "A portrayal of erotic behavior designed to cause sexual excitement" (Webster's Third International Dictionary).



Exposure to pornography and sexually explicit content can have significant impact on children, but there are differences between the two:

- **Pornography:** Pornography is typically created and distributed explicitly for the purpose of sexual arousal and gratification. It often features explicit sexual acts and is intended for adult audiences.
- **Sexually Explicit Content:** Sexually explicit content can encompass a broader range of material that includes explicit depictions of sexual content but may not necessarily be created for the sole purpose of sexual arousal. It can include explicit discussions of sexuality, nudity, or sexual behavior.

SO HOW BAD IS IT?

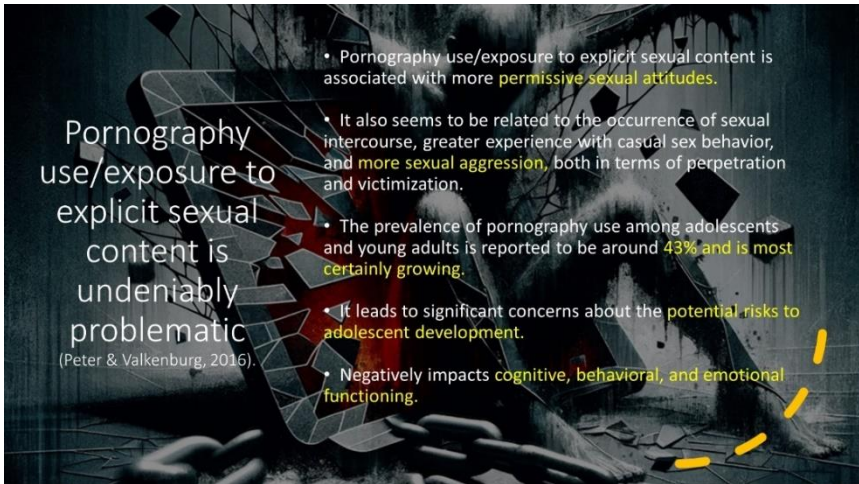
I count him braver who overcomes his
desires than him who conquers his enemies;
for the hardest victory is over self.

- Aristotle

Skinner, (2005) writes, “The sexual exposure that we face is unparalleled in the history of mankind. With television, the Internet, magazines, billboards, movies, and DVD’s, our society has been dehumanized...The result of this desensitization process is that children and teenagers are faced with sexual decisions before they fully understand the consequences of their own sexual behaviors. A teenager caught up in Internet pornography doesn’t understand that his curiosity can lead to an addiction.”

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If you are struggling with Internet pornography, you are not alone. The following alarming statistics highlight the gravity of the pornography crisis, as nicely reviewed by Zimbardo & Coulombe (2016) and Covenant Eyes (2019), as well as others:

- In 1997, about six years after the World Wide Web was launched, there were about 900 online porn sites (Ogasa et al., 2011).
- Later, in 2005, about 13,500 full-length pornographic films were released compared to only 600 Hollywood films (Ropelato, 2011).
- From 2001 to 2007, Internet porn went from a \$1-billion-a-year industry to \$3-billion-a-year in the U.S (Lambert et al., 2012).
- 40 million Americans watch porn regularly (Webroot, 2019).

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- The porn industry earns more revenue than CBS, NBC, and ABC combined (Roberts, 2008).
- The societal costs of pornography are staggering. The financial cost to business productivity in the U.S. alone is estimated at \$16.9 billion annually, but the human toll, particularly among our youth and in our families, is far greater (Weebroot, 2019).
- 40 million American people regularly visit porn sites (Weebroot, 2019).
- 35% of all Internet downloads are related to pornography (Weebroot, 2019).
- 34% of Internet users have experienced unwanted exposure to pornographic content through ads, pop-up ads, misdirected links or emails (Weebroot, 2019).
- One-third of porn viewers are women (Weebroot, 2019).
- Between 2008 and 2011, exposure to porn among boys under the age of 13 jumped from 14% to 49%. Boys' daily use more than doubled. (Sun et al., 2016)
- In 2016, in a study of 1,565 18-19-year-old Italian students (Pizzol et al., 2015), four out of five stated they consumed pornography. Almost 22% (21.9%) reported that it became habitual, 10% stated that it reduced their sexual interest towards potential real-life partners, and 9.1% reported a kind of addiction.

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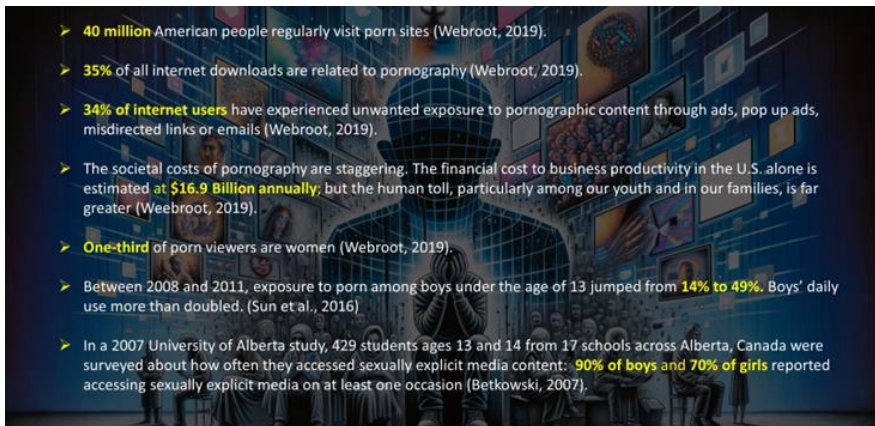
- In 2017, a Swedish study reported that nearly all respondents (98%) had watched pornography, although to different extents. Eleven percent were found to be frequent users (watched pornography one or more times per day), 69% were average users (at least once a month up to several times a week, but less than once per day), and 20% were infrequent users (less than once a month). (Donevan & Mattebo, 2017)
- In 2006, 35% of Dutch children aged 8 to 12 had had a negative Internet experience in the home, involving an encounter with pornography. (Soeters & van Schaik, 2006).
- Well over two-thirds of 15-17-year-old adolescents have seen porn websites when they did not intend to access them, with 45% being 'very' or 'somewhat' upset by it. (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2001)
- According to the National Coalition for the Protection of Children & Families, 2010, 47% of families in the United States reported that pornography is a problem in their homes (National Coalition for the Protection of Children & Families, 2010).
- In 2012, True Research conducted 2,017 online interviews with teens, aged 13-17, and parents of teens (SCRIBD, 2019) and found that 71% of teens have done something to hide what they do online from their parents (this includes clearing browser history, minimizing a browser when in view, deleting inappropriate videos, lying about behavior, using a phone instead of a computer, blocking parents with social media privacy settings, using private browsing, disabling parental controls, or having email or social media accounts unknown

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to parents). Thirty-two percent of teens admit to intentionally accessing nude or pornographic content online. Of these, 43% do so on a weekly basis. Only 12% of parents knew their teens were accessing pornography.

- In a 2007 University of Alberta study, 429 students aged 13 and 14 from 17 schools across Alberta, Canada were surveyed about how often they accessed sexually explicit media content: 90% of boys and 70% of girls reported accessing sexually explicit media on at least one occasion (Betkowski, 2007).



- According to a survey conducted by the Barna Group in the U.S. in 2014 (Proven Men Ministries, 2014):

The following percentages of men say they view pornography at least once a month: 18-30-year-olds, 79%; 31-49-year-olds, 67%; 50-68-year-olds, 49%.

The following percentages of men say they view pornography at least several times a week: 18-30-year-olds, 63%; 31-49-year-olds, 38%; 50-68-year-olds, 25%.

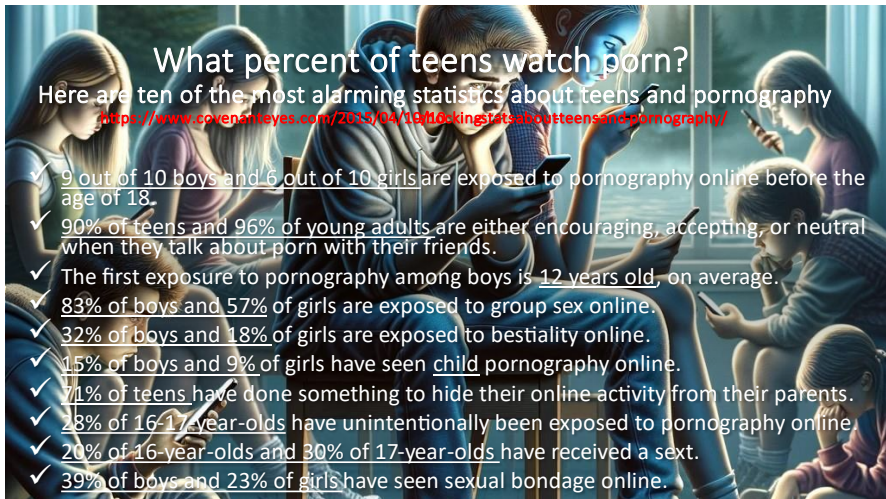
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The following percentages of women say they view pornography at least once a month: 18-30-year-olds, 76%; 31-49-year-olds, 16%; 50-68-year-olds, 4% .

The following percentages of women say they view pornography at least several times a week: 18-30-year-olds, 21%; 31-49-year-olds, 5%; 50-68-year-olds, 0%.

55% of married men say they watch porn at least once a month, compared to 70% of not married men. Pornography Statistics: 25% of married women say they watch porn at least once a month, compared to 16% of not married women.

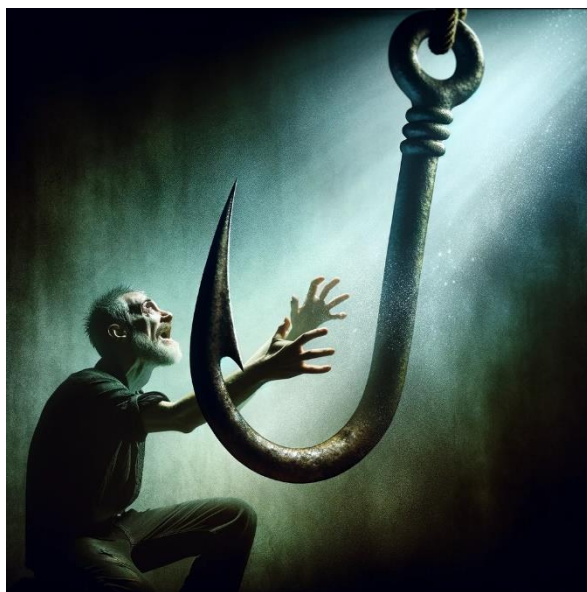


What percent of teens watch porn?
Here are ten of the most alarming statistics about teens and pornography
<https://www.covenanteyes.com/2015/04/19/16-interesting-facts-about-teens-and-pornography/>

- ✓ 9 out of 10 boys and 6 out of 10 girls are exposed to pornography online before the age of 18.
- ✓ 90% of teens and 96% of young adults are either encouraging, accepting, or neutral when they talk about porn with their friends.
- ✓ The first exposure to pornography among boys is 12 years old, on average.
- ✓ 83% of boys and 57% of girls are exposed to group sex online.
- ✓ 32% of boys and 18% of girls are exposed to bestiality online.
- ✓ 15% of boys and 9% of girls have seen child pornography online.
- ✓ 71% of teens have done something to hide their online activity from their parents.
- ✓ 28% of 16-17-year-olds have unintentionally been exposed to pornography online.
- ✓ 20% of 16-year-olds and 30% of 17-year-olds have received a sext.
- ✓ 39% of boys and 23% of girls have seen sexual bondage online.

SO HOW DID I GET

ADDICTED TO PORN IN THE FIRST PLACE?



“Shallow men believe in luck or in circumstance.
Strong men believe in cause and effect.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

So, let's look at the root cause of all of this. There are writers who support singular theories, and while each one has its own merit, I believe people get into porn for a myriad of reasons.

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It is important and helpful that we have some understanding of the root causes and of the neurological changes that ensue in the brain, body, and soul, as this enables us to deal with **blame and shame**, putting us in a better place to begin the healing process.

Writers have described addiction as being a function of:

- Lack of connected living (Hari, 2015)
- Trauma (Barta, 2018)
- It started off as just plain fun
- Some blend of the above
(emphasis mine)

While many ascribe “**moral failure**” as a root cause, I disagree with this wholeheartedly. Although a descent into addiction can lead to moral issues (e.g., lying to cover-up, sexual acting out, etc.), it is generally not moral failure that first sets pornography



addiction into motion. This is essential to know, as shaming only makes matters worse. Dr. Ted Roberts, who served in Vietnam as a fighter pilot, then became pastor, and subsequently distinguished himself as an expert in the treatment of sexual addictions, writes, “Guilt is about what we have done, but shame is about who we are. With guilt we can always get a fresh start. With shame we are caught in a noose because the problem stays with us...The critical issue to remember about shame is that it causes incredible pain” (Roberts, 2008, pp. 73 – 74).

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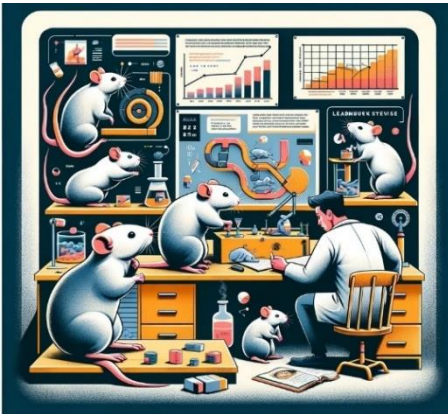
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The role of connection:

Johann Hari, author of *Lost Connections* and *Chasing the Scream*, and one of my literary heroes, believes that much of addiction starts with a lack of “connection.” In a compelling TED talk on addiction, Hari described the value of **connection** with references to Skinner’s research on addiction and ensuing Rat Park research conducted by Dr. Bruce Alexander (2010).

What can rats teach us about addiction?

In the 1960’s, well-known psychologist B.F. Skinner conducted a series of studies involving rats in what became known as **Skinner Boxes**. In these experiments, the rats were frequently starved and isolated and could get tiny pellets of food as long as they pushed a little lever within the Skinner Box over and over. In ensuing addiction



studies, these rats would be tethered to the box’s ceiling with a surgically-implanted needle that extended to the rats’ jugular vein, and each time the rats pushed the lever, they would get a small morphine drip into their brain. The result of these rather barbaric and cruel studies was

that the rats became hopelessly addicted, which led Skinner and his colleagues to conclude that the power of the addiction was solely in the drug itself.

A decade later, a Canadian researcher, Dr. Bruce Alexander, became very skeptical of this research, given that not all people who take a

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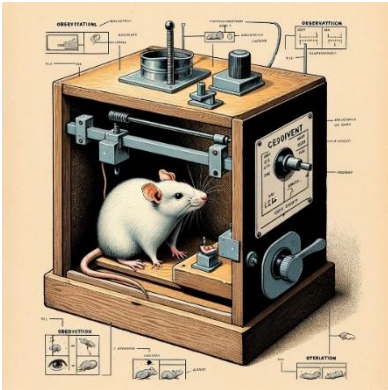
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drug will become addicted to it. Knowing that rats in their natural habitat, like people, are powerfully social, Alexander wondered if the Skinner experiments merely indicated that isolated rats are more likely to become addicted than non-isolated rats. With this premise in mind, Alexander and his research team developed an experiment with two groups of rats, each having free access to drug water, with one group being kept in isolation, similar to the Skinner Box experiments and the other group consisting of several rats together in large open areas filled with fun things that rats love, such as loads of food, platforms for climbing, running wheels, and tin cans to hide in. Happily, the second group, was co-ed, and the rats were free to have sex, which they apparently enjoy similar to humans. The second group setting eventually came to be affectionately known as the **Rat Park**. The results were stunning; the isolated rats in the Skinner Boxes became total addicts, and the rats in the open and enjoyable spaces of the Rat Park never became addicted, in fact, most of them never even touched the morphine water at all. Alexander eventually concluded that addiction was less about the pull of the drug and more about the condition of the life of the rats; specifically, without **connection** and **socialization** a rat is more susceptible to addiction. Moreover, he surmised, “People do not have to be put into cages to become addicted – but is there a sense in which people who become addicted actually feel ‘caged?’ The view from Rat Park is that today’s flood of addiction is occurring because our hyper-individualistic, hypercompetitive, frantic, crisis-ridden society make most people feel socially and culturally isolated...They find temporary relief in addiction to drugs or any of a thousand other habits (such as media – emphasis mine) and pursuits because addiction allows them to escape from their feelings, deaden their senses, and experience an addictive lifestyle as a substitute for a full life” (Alexander, 2010).

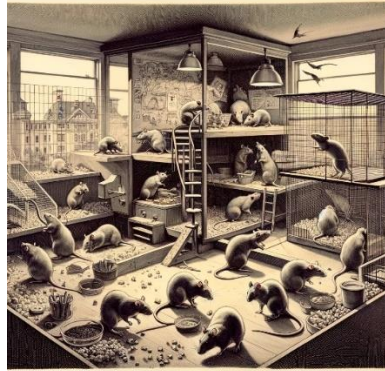
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Alexander later adds, “Addiction is not about your chemical hooks, it is about your cage, it is an adaptation to your environment.”



Skinner Box

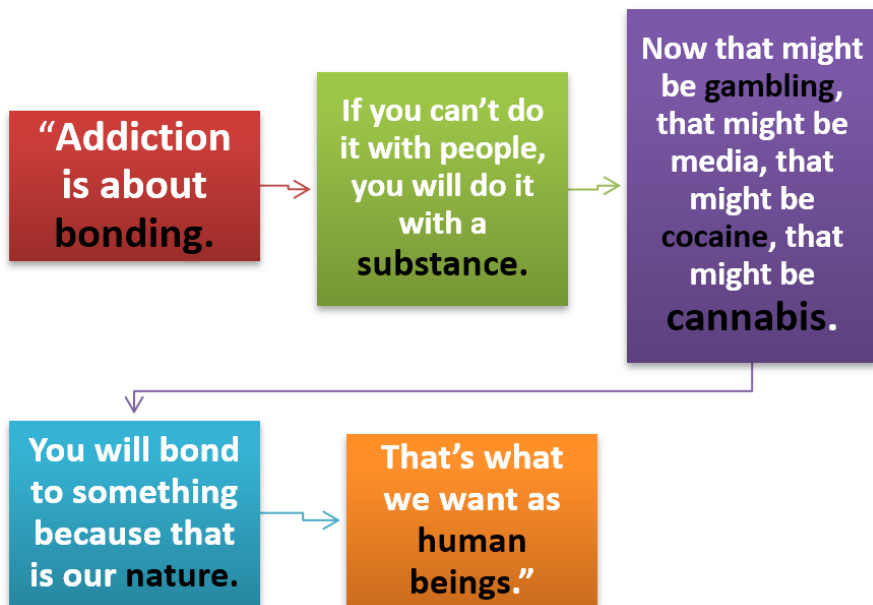


Rat Park

Hari (2015) in a TED talk nicely summarized his thoughts on the matter, “I’ve been talking about how disconnection is the major driver of addiction, and it’s weird to say (addiction has) grown, because we’re the most disconnected society that’s ever been, surely.” He adds, “Addiction is about bonding. If you can’t do it with people, you will do it with a substance. Now, that might be gambling, that might be media, that might be cocaine, that might be cannabis; you will bond to something because that is our nature. That’s what we want as human beings.”

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The role of trauma:

Dr. Michael Barta, in his excellent and compelling book on sexual addictions, TINSAs – Trauma Induced Sexual Addictions posits, along with several other writers, that sexual addiction has long been hindered by the disorder's poorly understood cause. He notes and describes:

- Sexual addiction, specifically pornography addiction, is typically triggered by early trauma
- Dopamine and self-regulation worsen addiction
- There is a relationship between the brain, the nervous system, and addiction

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Trauma occurs when we are faced with an experience that overwhelms our ability to process incoming information both at the



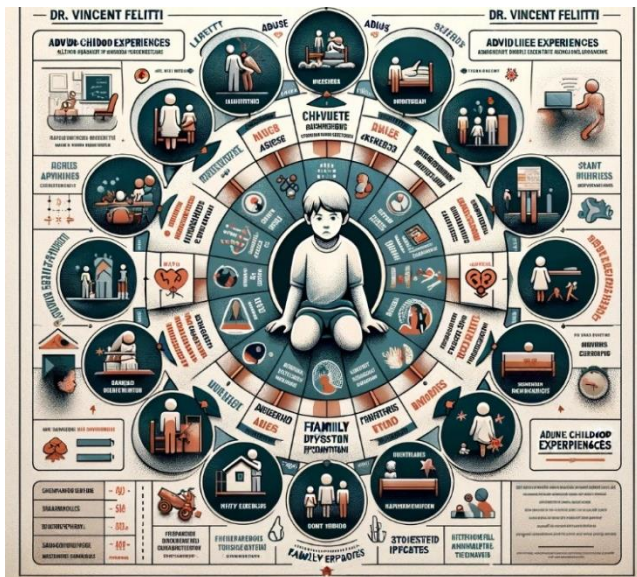
time of that experience and in future situations (Barta, 2018). Barta notes that trauma occurs when our natural defenses can't keep us safe from physical, emotional, or mental threats or harm.

In the mid-1980's, Dr. Vincent Felitti was commissioned by Kaiser Permanente to explore the issues of obesity, as nothing this hospital group was doing helped put a dent in improving this epidemic. His research led him to explore the impact of what he called the **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study** (Felitti et al., 2014). In this study, people were asked about ten different categories of horrible things that happened to them when they were children, including physical and sexual abuse, family problems, and neglect. The results indicated that for every category of traumatic experience we have had as a child, we are dramatically more likely to be depressed as an adult. If we have had six categories of traumatic events as a child, we are five times more likely to become depressed as an adult, and if we have had seven categories, were a terrifying 3,100 percent more likely to commit suicide as an adult (Felitti et al., 2014; Felitti 2004; Felitti and Anda, 2009).

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Adverse Childhood Experiences



The ten reference categories experienced during childhood or adolescence are as below, with their prevalence in parentheses (Felitti and Anda, 2009):

Abuse

- Emotional – recurrent threats, humiliation (11%)
- Physical - beating, not spanking (28%)
- Contact sexual abuse (28% women, 16% men; 22% overall)

Household dysfunction

- Mother treated violently (13%)
- Household member was an alcoholic or drug user (27%)
- Household member was imprisoned (6%)
- Household member was chronically depressed, suicidal, mentally ill, or in psychiatric hospital (17%)
- Not raised by both biological parents (23%)

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Neglect

- Physical (10%)
- Emotional (15%)

Somewhat surprising in the Felitti studies was that emotional abuse was more likely to cause depression than any other kind of trauma – even sexual abuse. This suggests that the kind of treatment children receive from parents is a tremendously powerful predictor of positive outcome, and when that trust is broken, devastation surely ensues.

Barta (2018) defines ACEs a little differently, as summarized below:

- Sexual assault or abuse
- Physical assault or abuse
- Psychological or emotional trauma
- Serious accidents, medical procedures, or illnesses
- Man-made or natural disasters
- Witnessing violence, including domestic abuse
- School violence, including bullying
- Traumatic grief or unwanted separation
- Terrorism or war
- Betrayal by others, including relational trauma

The experts in the field divide trauma into two categories:

- **Big T trauma**: Traumas associated with horrific single events, such as natural disasters, terrorism, and war.
- **Little t trauma**: Trauma smaller in nature, such as bullying, neglect, and betrayal. I respectfully take issue with the term “little t” as this type of trauma is devastating to normal development, and there is nothing “little” about it.

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Big T and Little t Trauma

Big T Trauma:

- Natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes)
- Serious accidents/life-threatening illnesses
- Violent personal assaults (e.g., rape, mugging, domestic violence)
- Military combat or war experiences
- Terrorist attacks
- Witnessing a death or severe injury
- Being held hostage or kidnapped
- Torture
- Severe childhood neglect or abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional)



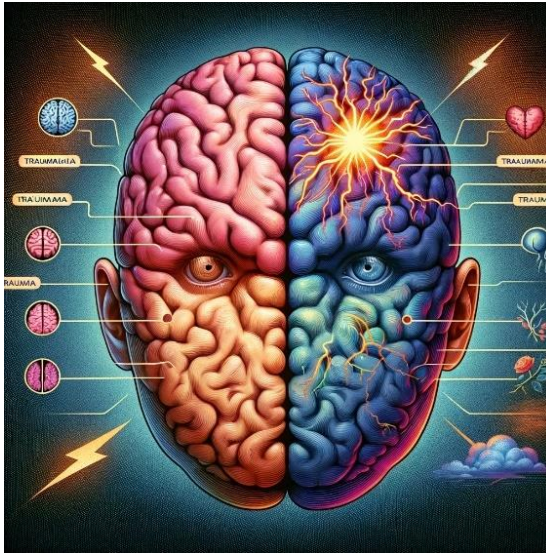
Little t Trauma:

- Bullying or harassment
- Emotional abuse or neglect
- Loss of a significant relationship (e.g., breakups, divorce)
- Non-life-threatening injuries
- Chronic low-level stressors (e.g., ongoing financial stress, job stress)
- Minor surgery or medical procedures
- Legal issues (e.g., lawsuits, custody battles)
- Moving to a new location or frequent changes in living situations
- Persistent conflict in personal or professional relationships

In my work as a pediatric psychologist, far more of my patients have been subjected to “little t” traumas, and I agree with Barta that these experiences have a tremendous impact on how children view themselves, their relationships, and their place in the world. Moreover, the long-term consequences of these traumas are tremendous and often lead to an inability or impaired ability to access appropriate responses to threatening events and can lead to chronic hyperarousal, intense anxiety, panic, mood instability, poor emotional/behavioral regulation, feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, shame, and even immobility. Of all traumas, relational trauma is particularly devastating.

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Trauma changes the brain neurologically

The implications here are enormous. Specifically, in order to heal from our addiction, we must be able to pinpoint where in the lifespan people hurt us physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually, whether intentionally or accidentally. Barta (2015) provides several examples of trauma often reported by individuals who suffer from sexual/pornography addiction, as noted below. To be clear, most of us experience at least some of these traumas. If we can resolve them, we can move on and experience a more fulfilling life. On the other hand, many addicts cannot resolve them, and it is those unresolved issues that open the gateway to addiction as a means of coping.

Examples of small traumas that can pave the way to pornography addiction, as noted by Barta (2015):

- They were not attuned (well connected) to by their caregiver
- They were invalidated for the child they were

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- They were not recognized emotionally
- They were rejected
- They were subjected to parental separation or divorce
- They were made to feel inadequate
- They were made to feel responsible for making the family feel good
- They were sexually abused
- They were punished for being authentic
- They were controlled by anger
- They were made to feel responsible for regulating the feelings and emotions of others
- They were not taught how to deal with their own emotions and/or were punished when trying to do so
- They were made to feel unsafe
- They were inappropriately disciplined/punished – kicked, slapped, or violently shaken
- They experienced the loss of a pet, young love, or friendship

My experience is that the most common forms of trauma are due to a lack of attunement or connection with parental or adult figures while growing up. As Barta (2015) writes, “These deficiencies are not about bad parenting but about a parent’s inability or diminished ability to respond to the child’s emotional needs. Most parents are doing the best they can with the tools they have, but whether

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deliberately or inadvertently, the traumas of our childhood can have tremendous impact on our lives (Barta, 2018, p. 17).

As trauma expert Dr. Peter Levine notes in his book, *Healing Trauma*, “Trauma is much about loss of connection – to ourselves, our bodies, our families, others, and the world around us. This loss of connection is often hard to recognize because it doesn’t happen all at once. It can happen slowly over time, and we adapt to these subtle changes sometimes without even noticing them. These are the hidden effects of trauma, the ones most of us keep to ourselves...Our choices become limited as we avoid certain feelings, people, and situations. The result of a gradual constriction of freedom is the loss of vitality and potential for the fulfilment of our dreams” (Levine, 2008, p. 9).

ACE Scores and Clinical Outcomes

As Dr. Felitti in a 2009 lecture points out, studies reveal many shocking longterm horrible outcomes when we are exposed to ACEs and this raises exponentially according to how many of them, we have been exposed to.

The results indicate that for every category of traumatic experience we have had as a child, we are dramatically more likely to be depressed as an adult.

If we have ACE scores of 4, we are:

- 260% more likely to have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease than someone with a score of 0
- 240% more likely to contract hepatitis, 460% more likely to experience depression
- 1,220% more likely to attempt suicide

If we have ACE scores of 6, we are:

- Five times more likely to become depressed as an adult

If we have ACE scores of 7, we are :

- 3,100 percent more likely to attempt suicide as an adult (Felitti et al., 2014; Felitti 2004; Felitti and Anda, 2009; Felitti et al., 1998).

Most important to normal development is “**social engagement**,” which is the ability to know, understand, regulate, and express emotions in the present moment. Even though everyone is born with a social engagement system (i.e., a neurological system that promotes human connection), we know that early trauma can

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disrupt its normal development. Anda et al. (2018) note, “Early adverse experiences may disrupt the ability to form long-term attachments in adulthood. The unsuccessful search for attachment may lead to sexual relations with multiple partners with resultant promiscuity and other issues related to sexuality” (e.g., pornography addiction, emphasis mine). As a result of adverse developmental trauma, the ensuing loss of connection with our inner self, our bodies, others, and the world around us, we are predisposed to engage in addictive behaviors to relieve the emotional dysregulation that torments us.

Barta (2018) conjectures, and I agree, that pursuing an addiction is an extremely effective solution that works, but only initially. Addiction, he writes, is a guaranteed solution that promises the prospect of making everything better. Sadly, in the long term, this fix is nothing better than a small bandage on a deep wound. Indeed, the addiction, in this case pornography, initially kills the unbearable pain, but it comes at a price – one that demands payment.



It will cost your happiness, your ability to connect with a wholesome life, your family, your career, your reputation, your dignity, **and possibly your life**. In short, it can cost you everything – and nothing is worth that price!

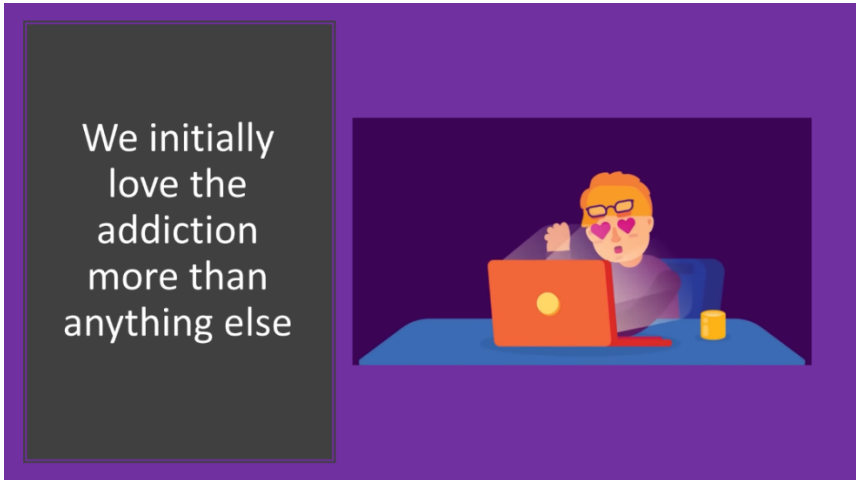
It's just fun:

Many young people accidentally discover pornography, many others are introduced to it by another person, usually a peer, partner, or a sibling. And indeed, they find it tantalizing and fun. They are not

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seeking to avoid pain, nor are they necessarily suffering from a loss of connection to good living. So, what starts off innocently enough, ends up changing their neurology, and they “accidentally” become seriously addicted.



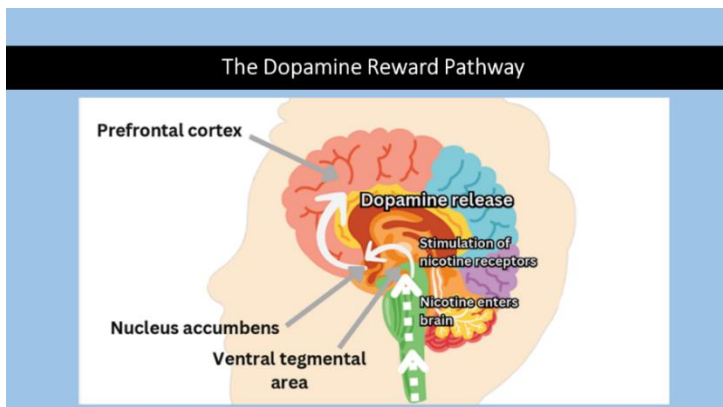
THE NEUROSCIENCE OF ADDICTION

The Role of Dopamine:

Men have become the tools of their tools

- Thoreau

As Kardaras (2016) stated in his book, *Glow Kids*, we need to understand the brain's reward system and the impact of **dopamine** on that reward pathway to fully understand addiction.

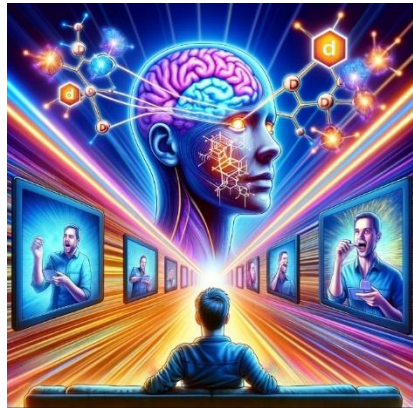


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Specifically, how much dopamine is activated by a substance or behavior is correlated directly with the addictive potential of that substance or behavior. **Dopamine**, as many of us know, is the “feel-good” neurotransmitter that is the most critical and important part of the addiction process. Dopamine was discovered in 1958 by Arvid Carlsson and Niles-Ake Hillarp at the National Heart Institute of Sweden. As also noted by psychologist Dr. Susan Weinschenk (2009), **dopamine** is created in various parts of the brain and is critical in several brain functions to include:

- Thinking
- Moving
- Sleeping
- Mood
- Attention
- Motivation
- Seeking and reward



Inspired to watch because of dopamine.

When an individual performs an action that is satisfying to a need or fulfills a desire, dopamine is released into the nucleus accumbens, a cluster of nerve cells beneath the cerebral hemisphere specifically associated with reward and pleasure. This is also known as the brain’s “**pleasure center.**” Basically, engaging in a pleasure-seeking behavior increases dopamine levels so that the dopamine pathway is activated, which tells the person to repeat what s/he just did to continue that “feel-good” sensation, or as Kardaras calls it, “**the dopamine trickle.**” From an evolutionary perspective, this dopamine trickle is an important survival mechanism as it rewards, and, thus,

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incentivizes essential and important biological and social functions, such as eating, procreation, love, friendship, and novelty seeking. Natural dopaminergic activities, such as eating and sex, usually come after effort and delay and as previously mentioned, serve a survival function. These are called the “**natural rewards**” as contrasted with addictive chemicals/behaviors (which can hijack the same circuitry). In other words, addictive drugs and behaviors, such as gambling and video gaming, actually offer a *short-circuit* to this process, which only ends up flooding the nucleus accumbens with dopamine and does not serve any biological function.

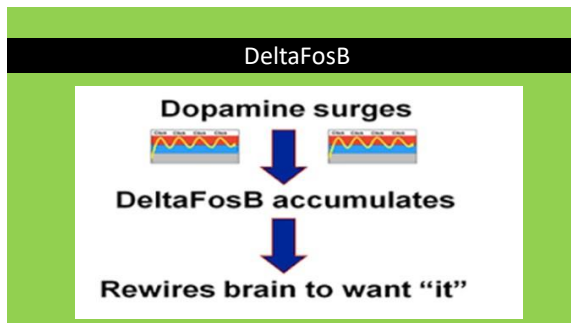
As Wilson (2014) points out, the evolutionary purpose of dopamine is to motivate you to do what serves your genes. The bigger the hit of dopamine, the more you want or even crave the goal. Dopamine surges are the barometer by which you determine the potential value of any particular experience. Moreover, dopamine tells you what to remember by rewiring your brain by virtue of new and even stronger nerve connections.

Although dopamine has been referred to as the “pleasure molecule,” it is more about seeking and searching for pleasure, rather than pleasure itself. Dopamine is more involved in drive and motivation to seek. The “final reward,” or what we experience as feelings of pleasure, Wilson (2014) writes, involve the release of **endogenous opioids**. You can think of dopamine as “wanting” and opioids as “liking.” As psychologist Dr. Weinschenk explains, dopamine causes us to want, desire, seek out and, search; however, the dopamine system is stronger than the opioid system, and we hence seek more than we are as satisfied...” Seeking is more likely to keep us alive rather than sitting around in a satisfied stupor. (Weinschenk, 2009). “Addicts want it more but gradually like it less. Addiction might be thought of as *wanting gone amok*.” (Wilson, 2014).

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Wilson (2014) explains that the neurological process does not stop there. Highly salient activities, in this case, addiction, lead to the accumulation of **DeltaFosB**, a protein that activates the genes involved with addiction. The molecular changes it potentiates are almost identical for both sexual conditioning and chronic drug use. Specifically, **DeltaFosB** rewires the brain to crave IT, whatever IT is. This is quite adaptive in situations where survival is furthered by overriding satiation mechanisms (e.g., I'm full, I'm done). In terms of the survival of the species, Wilson points out that excess food or sex signals the brain that you have hit the "evolutionary jackpot," and a powerful incentive kicks in gear. For example, wolves, which need to stow away huge amounts of food (up to twenty pounds) of a single kill will continue to consume their kill even though they are full. This is particularly salient in porn addiction. In a sense, dopamine is like the foreman on a construction site barking orders, and **DeltaFosB** is the worker on the site. Dopamine is yelling, "This activity is really important, and you should do it again and again" (Wilson, 2014). **DeltaFosB** is responsible for ensuring that you remember and repeat the activity. This repeated process produces what is called **sensitization**, which is based on the principle, "Nerve cells that fire together, wire together." Repeated activity strengthens cell connections.



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As the brain recognizes that it needs a rest, it will kick out **CREB** to slow things down. In essence, **DeltaFosB** acts like the gas pedal, and **CREB** functions as the brakes. It specifically inhibits dopamine and endogenous opioids to take the joy out of the binging/addictive behavior or substance so that you can give it a rest (Wilson, 2014). This numbed pleasure response induced by CREB is often identified as **desensitization**, which leads to **tolerance** - the need for increasingly higher doses to achieve the same effect. Tolerance is a key factor in addiction (Wilson, 2014).

While **CREB** can help to perhaps curb less sensational behaviors, such as too many portions of a good meal, it has little chance against high valence substances, such as cocaine, porn media, and intense game media. This leads to what Wilson (2014) calls “*nature’s cruel joke.*” Specifically, **CREB’s** attempt to suppress dopamine and natural/endogenous opioids is insufficient to shut down the process in highly salient addictions/behaviors in today’s world. Therefore, the person’s pleasure response is not sufficiently attenuated, so they are driven to more extreme addiction behavior. In other words, **CREB** can lead to tolerance, which can result in more compulsive use and escalation, which is particularly salient in porn addiction. So, we see that chronic overstimulation can lead to two opposite effects:

- Increased dopamine activity (wanting/seeking it more) – sensitization via DeltaFosB
- Decreased dopamine and opioid activity (liking it/enjoying it less) – via desensitization via CREB

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So, we see that chronic overstimulation can lead to two opposite effects:

- 01 Increased dopamine activity (wanting/seeking it more) – sensitization via **DeltaFosB**
- 02 Decreased dopamine and opioid activity (liking it/enjoying it less) – desensitization via **CREB**

Sadly, the evolutionary process has not provided any way to withstand that onslaught of dopamine in that when we become addicted, we experience a reduction of dopamine or a shutdown of dopamine to give some reprieve to the overwhelmed receptor cells. So, with this reduced capacity to produce dopamine naturally, we enter into a vicious cycle whereby we need to ingest increasing amounts of the addictive substance in question or engage in the addictive behavior in question just to maintain our dopamine level (Wilson, 2014).

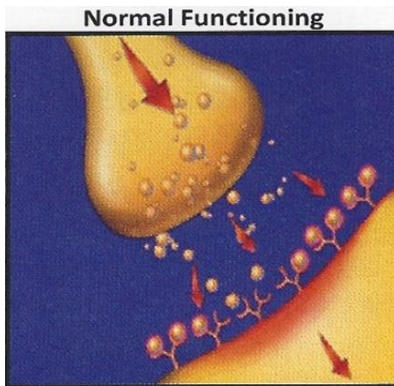
Then, as a “double whammy,” this chronic exposure to addictive behaviors or substances then impacts negatively on the prefrontal cortex, which, among other things, is the brain’s decision-making center, which is associated with impulse-control or “braking mechanism.” As the prefrontal cortex’s braking mechanism becomes increasingly impaired, we are far less able to put on the brakes and refrain from the addictive substance or behavior (Wilson, 2014).

More on **Sensitization** and **Desensitization** on a cellular level:

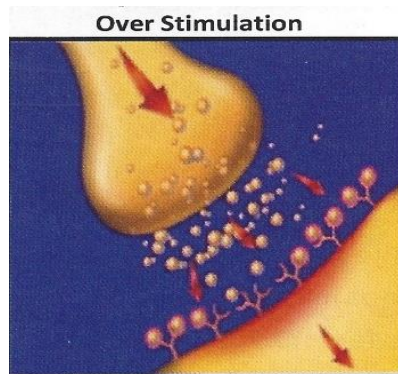
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Sensitization: Dr. Robert Didinger, in his workbook, *Pornography Addiction: Breaking through the Chains*, nicely describes the biological changes on the cellular level that occur. Specifically, the first biological process, sensitization, begins when a source of stimulation is associated with high levels of dopamine, and the brain becomes hypersensitive to this resource. In the case of pornography, the images become burned into memory, creating “super memories” that the brain recalls regularly to stimulate the desire to seek more pornography (Didinger, 2018). So, at the synapse (the space between neurons that connect via tiny vesicles of dopamine that cross over to fire up the next neuron), there is an increase of dopamine vesicles crossing that synapse. The images below, as noted in Didinger, portray the changes:



(Adapted from Stuff4Educators.com, 2014)



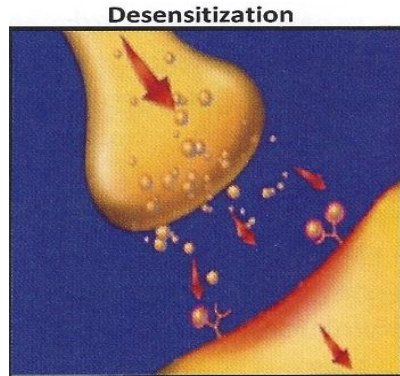
(Adapted from Stuff4Educators.com, 2014)

Didinger, 2018

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Desensitization: The next step in the process of developing addiction on the cellular level is desensitization, which refers to a general dialing down (as previously noted) of responsiveness to all forms of pleasure. This process occurs as result of prolonged dopamine production (Volkow et al., 2101). As Dindinger (2018)

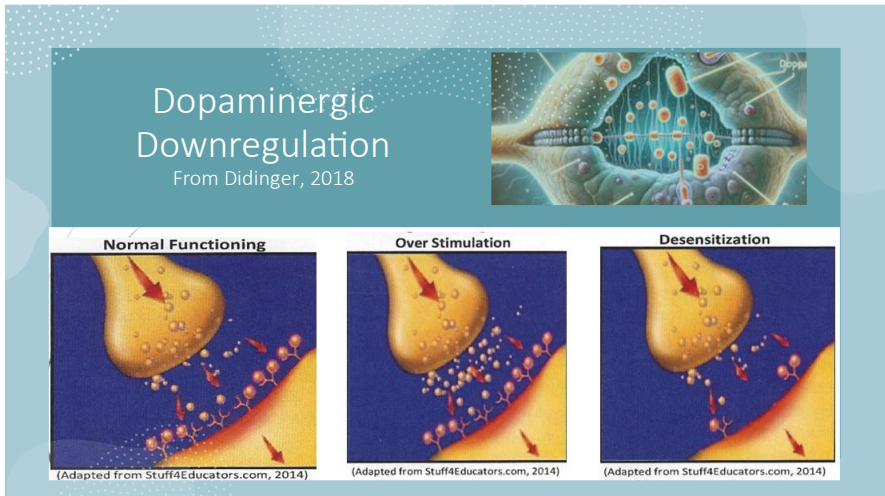


(Adapted from Stuff4Educators.com, 2014)

notes, when high valence stimuli. such as pornography. are encountered, dopamine increases dramatically which eventually results in overstimulation, something we might like, but our brain doesn't. As with most biological processes, our brain will seek a state of homeostasis or normalcy. Dindinger adds that our brain effectively retaliates by reducing the amount of receptor sites available to receive the dopaminergic stimulation as can be seen in the graphic above (adapted from Didinger, 2018). Sadly, this loss of receptor sites during desensitization effectively and qualitatively changes how we experience normal sources of pleasure. As a result, essential and healthy survival resources, such as friends, food, family achievement, social activities, and dating, become weaker and less pleasurable, and we pursue them less or stop pursuing them altogether. In other words, sources that used to bring us pleasure no longer hit the mark, and we then seek higher and higher valence sources in the quest of more intense dopamine.... thus, we seek more extreme levels of pornography to achieve this.

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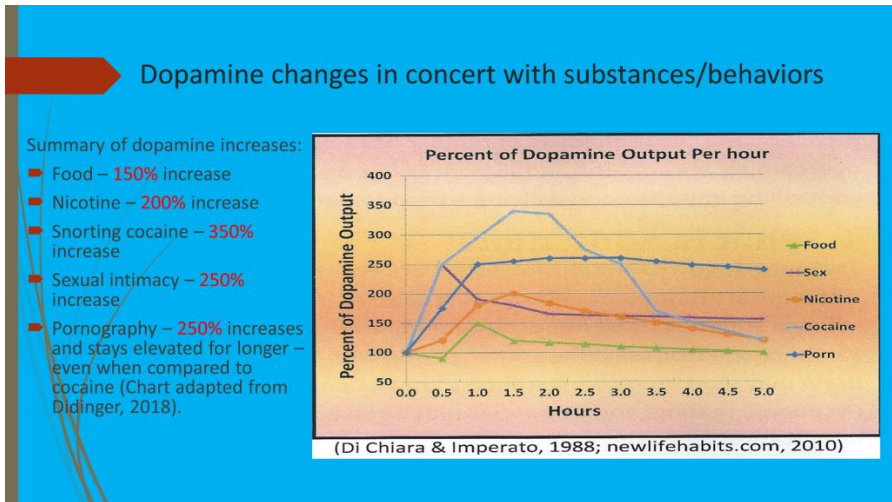


The use of pornography increases dopamine the same as sexual intimacy does, **250%**, but what is alarming is that it maintains the dopamine level much longer than sexual intimacy does. Dr. Didingar comments that even with an extremely addictive drug like cocaine, which increases dopamine by **350%**, dopamine levels decrease much faster than with pornography. As such, he notes that the brain interprets pornography to be extremely valuable and necessary for survival, thus essential to maintain, which helps to perpetuate the descent into addiction (Didinger, 2018).

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As can be seen in the chart below:



Hypofrontality – Not a good thing:

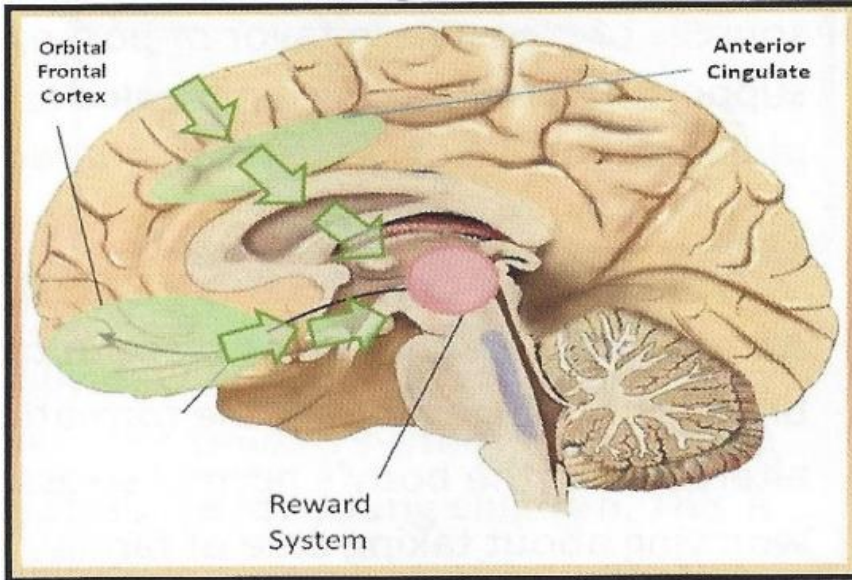
As Dindinger (2018) points out, at the beginning of developing an addiction such as pornography, sensitization and desensitization of dopaminergic pathways are the primary driving forces. Once an addiction is on its way to becoming fully established, hypofrontality kicks in to ensure that the new substance or behavior is maintained. In many ways, hypofrontality is very insidious as it removes our ability to override or stop porn-seeking (Hilton, 2007).

Two areas of the brain, the **anterior cingulate** and the **orbital frontal cortex**, serve as a protective mechanism to counter the reward system's desire for ever-increasing dopamine increase. Specifically, they help us to avoid and/or continue in activities or behaviors that could potentially harm us. For example, Freddy wants to ditch football practice and go off with friends to smoke some weed, which would greatly increase dopamine and help to begin the process of rewiring his brain. However, the anterior cingulate and orbital

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frontal cortex jump in and suppress the reward system to avoid the negative consequences of possibly being kicked off the team, not to mention losing the car keys.

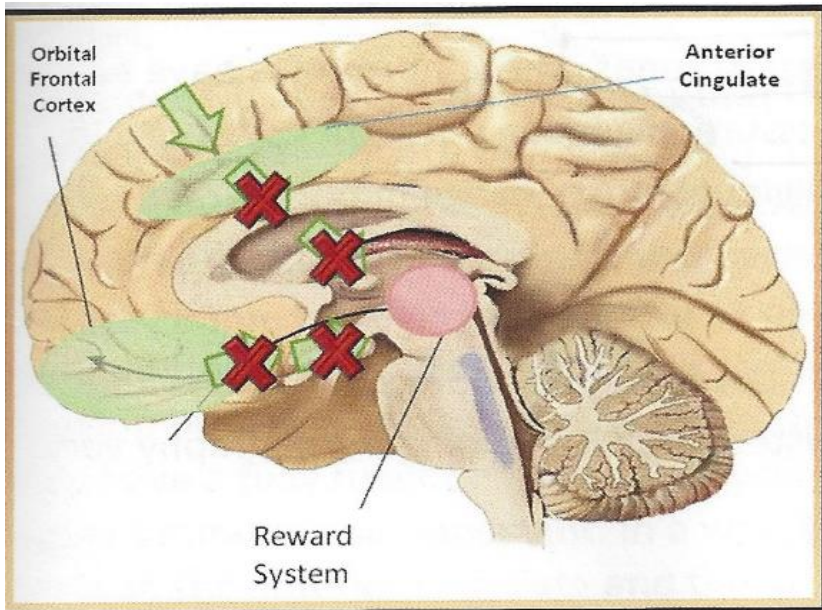


(Adapted from Study Blue, 2007)

The reward system is successfully shut down

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(Adapted from Study Blue, 2007)

The reward system fails to get shut down

The Marriage of Triune Brain Theory and Polyvagal Theory

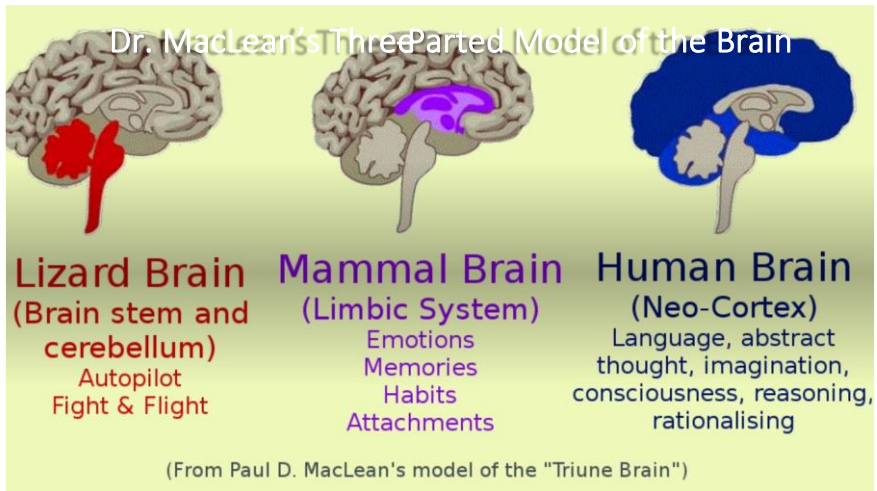
Barta (2018) proposes a model that demonstrates how the brain and the nervous system work together to fuel addiction. In his model, which he calls TINSAs (Trauma Induced Sexual Addictions), he pairs some of the greatest minds in neurology and psychology to include Dr. Stephen Porges' **Polyvagal Theory** and Maclean's **Triune Brain Theory**.

In order to understand more fully what is going on within us that begins to drive us to addiction, we must dig a little deeper and learn some neuroscience. We will again look to Barta (2018) for guidance.

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Triune Brain Theory:



MacLean (2009) proposed that there are three distinct formations in our brain, which are used in different situations for everyday survival purposes. These specific structures are developed sequentially on top of each other at different times during the evolution of the brain for the purpose of giving the organism the ability to survive during that period of time. Even though the brain has become more advanced and adaptive, the older more primitive structures of the brain still play a very important role in thought, process, and behavior.

(For my Christian friends who might worry about this model contradicting sensitivities about creationism – not to worry. As explained by Dr. Andy Doan, M.D. Ph.D., Ophthalmology surgeon and neuroscience researcher, and paraphrased by me, “God is very efficient, and He included in our more developed brain substructures that He already designed for lower life forms/animals. No need to re-do what was already excellent and efficient”).

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As described by Barta (2018): they are:

The Reptilian Brain (or Reptilian Complex):



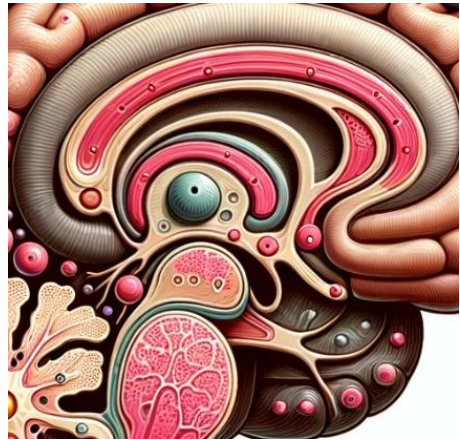
As the name suggests, this is the most primitive brain that developed about 500 million years ago in fish and, later, reptiles. Its roles include sensation, instinctual reaction, breathing and temperature regulation. TINSAs hypothesizes that the reptilian complex also promotes certain survival functions, most specifically, immobilization or freeze. We often see lizards, for example, freeze in the face of danger, such as a lunch-starved predator in an instinctive reaction that can be life-saving (sadly for the lizard, it doesn't always work, and he sometimes ends up being a snack anyway). We also see this in humans in the face of terrifying situations. Like our lizard friends, it sometimes works, and other times gets us killed.

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The Mammalian Brain (or Limbic System):

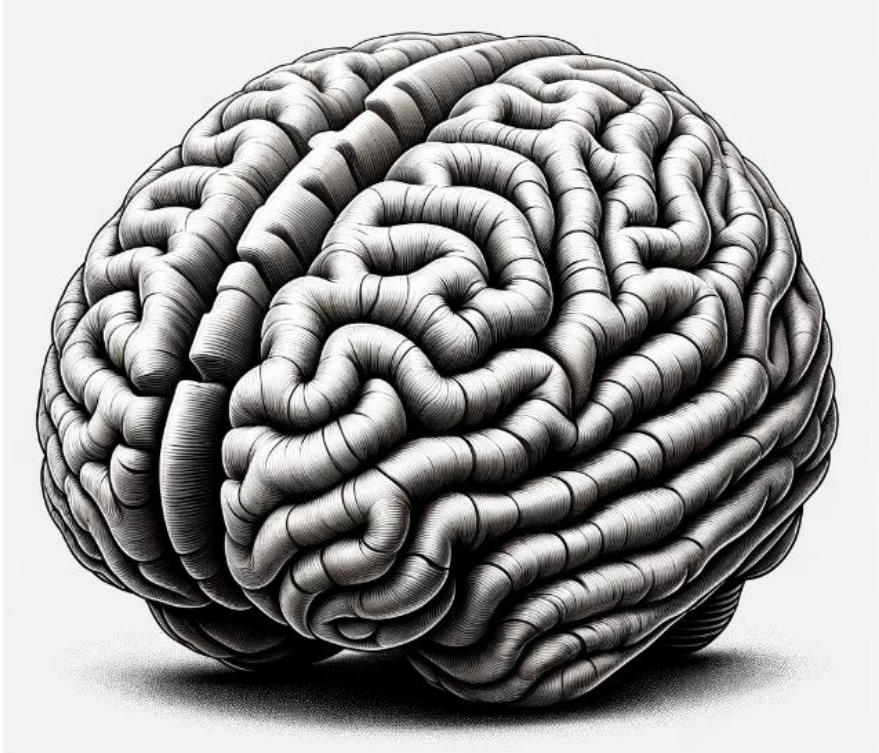
Later, about 150 million years ago, the limbic system first appeared in small animals. This system developed as critters could move more freely about as they were now equipped with extremities. As such, it often became necessary to either fight off or flee from would-be predators. In addition, the capacity to have memory and emotions developed. This enabled the animal to control the body's response to danger and remember that danger as well as the ability to be vigilant and scan the surrounding environment for potential dangers. Like critters, we often revert to this neurological system when we act instinctively.



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The Frontal Lobe (or Neocortex):



According to Maclean (1990), the frontal lobes came on board only about two or three million years ago. As in the reptilian brain and the limbic system, the purpose of this brain formation is to react to and protect us from danger. But unlike our more primitive neighbors, this system reacts **consciously**. Very importantly, there was a need to develop a system that made possible more “civilized” responses to threats and, at the same time, one that offered the possibility to *connect* to others for safety. Therefore, the frontal lobe allows us to access a new way of surviving based on **socialization**. This makes it possible for us to use analysis, logic, and decision-making, which

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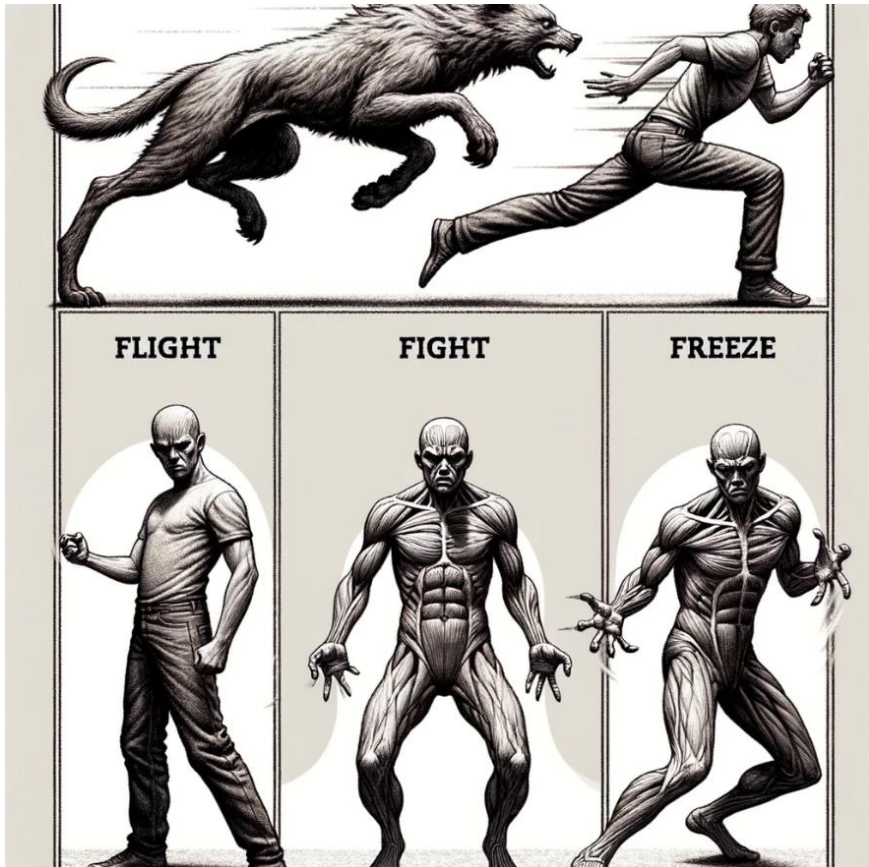
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specifically separate us from other lower-ordered animals that rely on instincts alone for survival.

To bring it home, on topside, we have the cortical brain, which consists of the frontal lobe, the most recently developed portion of the brain, i.e., **the conscious, thinking brain**. At the bottom, we have our subcortical, unconscious brain, made up of the **reptilian and limbic complexes** and is directed largely by raw instinct and emotions, which often results in immediate knee-jerk reactions that happen in a split second. Barta (2018) informs us that, in the best of worlds, we try to lead with our frontal lobe and remain socially engaged if something threatening confronts us, and, and/or stay calm to think our way out of it. But in times of intense stress or in situations that remind us of past trauma, this survival mechanism is quickly overrun by earlier, more primitive survival strategies of our mammalian/limbic brain and our reptilian brain structures. As such, when our neocortex fails us, the limbic system takes command, and we are then rapidly sent into our fight-or-flight response, if this does not work and we cannot run away or fight our way out of it, the most primitive line of defense is deployed, and we simply freeze, become immobilized, or completely collapse. This hijacking process can occur whether the threat is real or merely perceived (Barta, 2018).

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According to Barta (2018), addicts, including pornography addicts, live much more in their unconscious, emotional, and instinctual brains than in their frontal lobe or social engagement system. As such, when the limbic and reptilian brain take charge, the conscious brain switches off and the higher order brain is essentially hijacked, and we end up not thinking and instead just reacting. As a result, the consequences are not weighed very heavily, if at all.

As a postscript to this discussion on Triune Brain Theory, Perry and Pollard (1997) have suggested that people who have experienced trauma, both in utero and shortly after that, develop fewer

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dopamine receptors early in life, which can predispose them to addiction. With a deficit in dopamine receptors, that person is set up to search for something to make him or her feel good, and often, that is sexual stimuli. What better avenue is there to accomplish that than with pornography, as it is so readily and freely available? This floods the **nucleus accumbens** with too much dopamine. Moreover, the first solution we find to this problem of lack of dopamine, Barta (2018) asserts, is usually the one that we return to time and time again. No wonder I have had kids of trauma in therapy tell me they first started looking at porn as young as five years of age – an age when most kids are learning their ABCs and how to read their first words.

Polyvagal Theory:

In order to move forward in our understanding of what is happening to us as we progress toward addiction, we must understand Steven Porges' Polyvagal Theory and then integrate this knowledge with Triune Brain Theory. So, first, a little anatomy. The Autonomic Nervous System is a control system that acts largely unconsciously and regulates bodily functions, such as heart rate, digestion, respiratory rate, pupillary response, urination, and even sexual arousal. It has two main subdivisions: Sympathetic and Parasympathetic.

- **Sympathetic Division:** Prepares the body for stressful or emergency situations – fight or flight. Thus, the sympathetic division increases heart rate and the force of heart contractions and widens (dilates) the airways to make breathing easier. It causes the body to release stored energy. Muscular strength is increased. This division also causes

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palms to sweat, pupils to dilate, and hair to stand on end. It slows body processes that are less important in emergencies, such as digestion and urination (Merck Manual).

- **Parasympathetic Division:** Generally, the parasympathetic division conserves and restores calm/homeostasis. It slows the heart rate and decreases blood pressure. It stimulates the digestive tract to process food and eliminate wastes. Energy from the processed food is used to restore and build tissues (Merck Manual).

Steven Porges discovered that the parasympathetic division of the Autonomic Nervous System consists of two branches that lead to two different responses. The main nerve in the parasympathetic nervous system is the 10th cranial nerve, aka the **vagus nerve**, the largest of the 12 cranial nerves and has huge implications for our well-being and health. The vagus nerve has two very distinct branches: **Dorsal vagal nerve** and the **ventral vagal nerve**.

Dorsal Vagal Nerve: Barta (2018) notes that the most primitive form of defense occurs when the dorsal vagal nerve is activated. When activated, the dorsal vagal nerve promotes shutdown, freeze, and collapse. An example of this shutdown is when a gazelle, for example, is being stalked by a lion and when trapped with no possible way to flee, drops down, and appears to be deadlier than a doornail. This is not a conscious process but is, rather, a very primitive and unconscious one.

Ventral Vagal Nerve: Barta (2018) writes that the second response of our parasympathetic nervous system (the first being freeze and collapse, as noted above) is responsible for our ability to engage socially and handle social relationships. According to Barta, the social

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engagement system is controlled by our ventral vagus nerve, a very smart nerve with a rapid response time. As such, it allows us to “know” if we are safe enough so we can calm our defenses through a process of “neuroception.” roughly translated as the brain’s ability to sense safety. This serves not only bonding needs but allows us to shift out of sympathetic arousal and move into parasympathetic calm or downshift from activation to calm.

Through the marriage of MacLean’s Triune Brain Theory with Porges’ Polyvagal Theory, we can explain how each part of the triune brain correlates with the three responses of the autonomic nervous system (Barta, 2018).

The key concepts of the merge of MacLean’s Triune Brain Theory and Porges’ Polyvagal are summarized below:

| Triune Brain and Polyvagal Theories Merged | |
|---|--|
| Sympathetic | |
| Limbic System (Mammalian Brain) | |
| Developed 500 million years ago | |
| Fight or Flight | |
| Unconscious | |
| Social Engagement (Parasympathetic– Ventral Vagal) | |
| Frontal Lobe (Neocortex) | |
| Developed 2 to 3 million years ago | |
| Ventral Vagal | |
| Present/Safe/Aware | |
| Conscious | |
| Parasympathetic (Dorsal Vagal) | |
| Reptilian Brain (Reptilian Complex) | |
| Developed 150 million years ago | |
| Freeze | |
| Unconscious | |

In summary, excessive media, specifically pornography, serve to dangerously pull us out of the neocortex (wise thinking and conscious state) and into our reptilian brain (reflexive and unconscious state). At the same, this behavioral addiction shuts

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down much-needed parasympathetic calmness and safety, as well as connection and social engagement, and artificially fires up sympathetic arousal, which impacts our health emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

THE IMPACT OF PORNOGRAPHY ON THE BODY

In his compelling book, *How Pornography Harms*, Professor and Dr. John Foubert, an interdisciplinary scholar who has studied sexual violence since 1993 and the harms of pornography since 2006, reminds us of how, the tobacco industry icons testified before Congress in 1994 that they believed that cigarettes were not addictive or harmful, in contrast to a mountain of data available. In a very similar way, Dr. Foubert notes that there are powerful voices today that try to convince us that pornography isn't harmful either (Atwood et al., 2014). He adds that there are over **100 studies** that demonstrate that pornography harms people, often horribly and sometimes irrevocably (Malamuth et al., 2000; Peter et al., 2016).

Wilson (2014) notes that all addictions, regardless of their differences, result in an established set of “core brain changes,” which, in turn, present as recognized signs, symptoms, and behaviors that have been labeled the Four Cs:

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The Four C's of Addiction

• Wilson (2014) notes that all addictions, regardless of their differences, result in an established set of “**core brain changes**” which, in turn, present as recognized signs, symptoms, and behaviors such as those listed in the **four C's**:

1. **C**raving and Preoccupation with obtaining, engaging in or recovering from the use of the substance or behaviors in question.
2. **L**oss of Control in using the substance or of engaging in the behavior and noted by increasing frequency or duration, larger amounts or intensity, and/or increasing the risk and behavior in an effort to obtain the desired effect.
3. **N**egative Consequences in physical, social, occupational, financial, or psychological areas.
4. **C**ompulsive use in that one is driven to consume and can't stop voluntarily.



The Impact of Pornography on the Body:

When we are exposed to too much pornography and/or sexuality, it can be excessively overstimulating to the brain. The brain is simply not designed to process an event that is so sensorially overwhelming, dense with information, or involving too much stimulation (Barta, 2018). Gary Wilson (2014) writes that we are not wired to see the amount of sexuality that permeates in Internet pornography. He adds, “**Just one pornographic Internet exposure today is filled with more sexual content/information than most all his ancestors saw in his entire life.**”

Barta (2018) asserts that pornography by itself is not only a behavior that is often chosen to temporarily offer relief to trauma but has the potential to also be the very cause of trauma. In the same way that early trauma can cause proper brain function to effectively be stunted, early trauma can also cause functional irregularities to the autonomic nervous system.

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In an interview with Dr. Foubert, Dr. Donald Hilton, who has authored many studies on the addictive nature of pornography, referenced research that shows that the more people watch pornography, the more their **brains actually shrink**. Related to this, research has also demonstrated that watching pornography **slows down the working memory** (aka short-term memory) (Laier, et al., 2013). Along with this line of research, Kuhn and Gallinat (2014) found **decreased gray matter** in the brain areas responsible for decision-making and motivation of porn seekers. It is particularly significant that this study was not on porn addicts but simply on males who consume pornography. It is frightening that you don't even have to be "addicted" to porn but that merely using it begins to change the brain in negative ways. So, if you ever thought that pornography was making you **dumber**, you were absolutely right.



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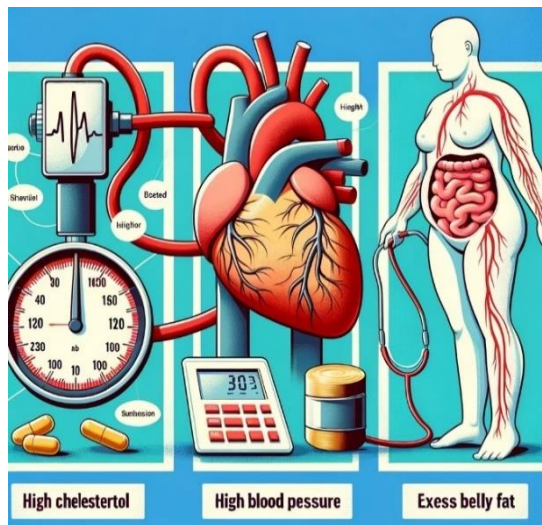
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Dunckley (2015) notes that excessive time on screens in any form (and by association, pornography viewing – emphasis mine) has huge impact on the body. As a result of electronic screen interaction/porn seeking:

- Blood flows away from the organs like the gut
- Blood pressure increases
- Stress hormones are released

All these processes prepare the body for fight-or-flight. The research indicates that all forms of screen-time create subtle changes in the cardiovascular system, which can cause significant damage over the course of time. The fact that screen-time is associated with what Dunckley (2015) refers to as **metabolic syndrome** is very concerning. Metabolic syndrome is a combination of the following:

- High blood pressure
- Midsection weight gain (spare tire)
- Abnormal cholesterol levels
- High fasting blood sugar



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Metabolic Syndrome is a serious condition that can promote:

- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Stroke

Dunckley (2015) notes that through the eyes, brain, and body, excessive consumption of media (in this case pornography) sends unnatural and overstimulating messages to the nervous system, which trigger and promote the fight-or-flight, as noted earlier.

In a very bravely candid and enlightening interview cited in Kardaras (2016), **Dr. Andrew Doan**, who received his M.D. at Johns Hopkins and also earned a Ph.D. in neuroscience, described his own extreme media addiction and subsequent hyperarousal symptoms while he was in medical school over a decade and a half ago, *“I had pain from my clicking finger all the way up to my forearm. And my cortisol levels were shot - through my hypothalamus-adrenal-pituitary axis (HPA), so I was getting fat because I had all of this cortisol floating around. I didn’t exercise, so I was retaining more body fat. And then, finally, my HPA axis was all dysregulated, so I was more prone to infection - I had pimples all over my face, I had stretch marks beginning. And then, finally, I got an infection in my armpit!*

So, in addition to the carpal tunnel, I had this armpit infection that was streaking down my arm. And on top of that, my blood pressure was high, my cholesterol was high because of the adrenaline rush. And because my blood pressure was high, and I was sitting all of the time, I had hemorrhoids the size of walnuts. - I mean, literally! I was a young man - I was pissed off. Why do I have hemorrhoids like some pregnant women do? We’re talking about bloody, painful hemorrhoids...So I’m convinced that if people are addicted to this

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thing, it's going to ruin their lives. It almost ruined mine - and it almost ruined my son and almost destroyed his confidence and his opportunities." I encourage you to read Dr. Doan's excellent book, *Hooked on Games*, for more detail on the devastating impact that media addiction had on his life and how he overcame it.

Kardaras (2016) notes that the overstimulation of glowing lights and flashing lights of screens (and by association, pornography viewing – emphasis mine) can damage **myelin** in neural pathways. Myelination is an important process that acts to insulate nerve cell axons to increase the speed at which information travels from one nerve cell to another. The myelinated axon can be likened to an electrical wire with insulating material around it. As Kardaras (2016) points out, myelin is extremely vulnerable to disruption, and specifically, oligodendrocytes, the brain cells that produce cholesterol for proper myelination can be damaged by trauma, environmental stressors, toxins, certain drugs, and overstimulation. He adds that when myelin is destroyed by overstimulation during key developmental periods, problems such as our ability to focus, feel empathy, or discern reality can all be negatively affected. It has been conjectured that myelination abnormalities can, in part, drive certain brain neuropsychiatric disorders that impact our entire life cycle, from ADHD and autism in infants and children, to schizophrenia and drug addiction in teens and young adults, and Alzheimer's in seniors (Kardaras, 2016).

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The **Impact of Chronic Hyperarousal**, as reported by Dunckley (2015), is summarized below:

Blood Flow Shifts: When a person is under stress, blood flow to the brain is shunted away from the higher regions of the brain, i.e., the cortex, and directed to the more primitive parts of the brain, i.e., the limbic or old brain, in an effort to promote survival. As Dunckley (2105) notes, when addiction of any kind occurs in adolescence,



there is a tendency to stunt the development of the frontal lobe, which, in particular, is responsible for decision-making, organization, planning, attention, impulse-control, task completion, emotional regulation, and inhibition, among others. She posits that if screen time (and by association, pornography viewing – emphasis mine) indeed induces a stress response and activates the addiction pathways, it very well could affect brain development in the long term by decreasing blood flow to the cortex and frontal lobe (Dunckley, 2015).

Elevated Cortisol: As noted by Dunckley (2015), studies indicate that electronic screen activity (and by association, pornography viewing – emphasis mine) impacts the regulation of cortisol (Wallenius, 2010). Although adrenaline is the primary hormone that is secreted in an acute stress reaction, in chronic stress reactions, the dominant hormone released is cortisol. While cortisol helps protect and promote survival in the short term, elevated cortisol levels over longer periods of time actually become quite harmful. As noted

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earlier, chronically elevated cortisol is associated with obesity, diabetes, hormone imbalance, metabolic syndrome, and high blood pressure (Pervanidou et al., 2011). When we are under significant stress, and when the body then needs access to fuel, cortisol allows for increased blood sugar to be available by counteracting insulin. This is not a problem in the short term, but it can promote weight gain specifically concentrated in the abdominal area and cause problems with insulin regulation if it continues for longer periods of time. In addition, elevated cortisol dysregulates the production of other hormones, including the thyroid and reproductive hormones, and over extended periods of time, excessive cortisol actually damages the brain (Nepomnaschy et al., 2004; Chrousos, 2012).

Oxidative Stress: Dunckley (2015) states that chronic stress, be it electronically triggered or otherwise, is damaging to the very system that fights stress. On a molecular level, all cellular reactions in the body produce free radicals, and these free radicals are unstable as they have unpaired electrons that seek to grab another electron in an effort to become stable. When a particular cell is healthy, the free radicals are cleared out or scavenged by sufficient amounts of antioxidants, and appropriate balance is preserved. However, when the cell's natural defenses are overwhelmed due to excessive stress, the antioxidants or scavengers are depleted, and oxidative stress or excessive free radicals develop. The free radicals and the unstable molecules that contain them build up and will then steal electrons from their own tissue. Proximal fats, proteins, and DNA are particularly vulnerable to being damaged. Over the course of time, this progresses to cause inflammation, tissue damage, and poor efficiency, lead to increasing degradation of the cell's ability to deal with acute and prolonged stress. The brain is especially susceptible to oxidative stress. First, oxidative stress can promote disruption of

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the blood-brain barrier, causing it to be more vulnerable to toxins. Second, oxidative stress degrades the myelin or fatty sheaths that insulate brain cells that promotes aberrant firing networks. Finally, the developing brain is particularly vulnerable to oxidative stress, much more so than the adult brain, as it is highly dynamic with increased energy needs (Dunckley, 2015).

Lack of myelination: Kardaras (2016) notes that the overstimulation of the glowing lights and flashing lights of screens can damage **myelin** in neural pathways. Myelination is an important process that acts to insulate nerve cell axons to increase the speed at which information travels from one nerve cell to another. The myelinated axon can be likened to an electrical wire with insulating material around it. As Kardaras (2016) points out, myelin is extremely vulnerable to disruption, and specifically oligodendrocytes, the brain cells that produce cholesterol for proper myelination, can be damaged by trauma, environmental stressors, toxins, certain drugs, and overstimulation. He adds that when myelin is destroyed by overstimulation during key developmental periods, problems such as our ability to focus, feel empathy, or discern reality can all be negatively affected. It has been conjectured that myelination abnormalities can, in part, drive certain brain neuropsychiatric disorders that impact our entire life cycle, from ADHD and autism in infants and children, to schizophrenia and drug addiction in teens and young adults, and to Alzheimer's in seniors (Kardaras, 2016).

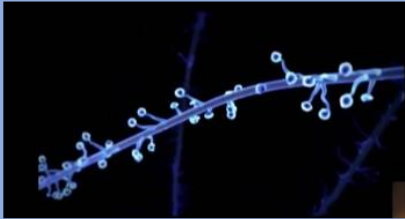
Dr. Collier notes that addiction results in dendritic growth on the neuron, which causes permanent changes in the brain. Although the brain can heal in many ways when one stops the addiction, these dendritic changes are permanent, which helps to explain why continual craving is such a problem (Collier, 2020). In other words,

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the extra receptors on the neuron lie in wait for the substance and will quickly bring on the addiction in full force once they receive the substance in question.

Excessive dopamine flow triggered by addiction causes dendritic growth on the neuron which results in permanent changes in the brain. This explains why craving is an everlasting consequence that must be respected throughout the lifetime (images adapted from Collier, 2020).



THE IMPACT OF PORNOGRAPHY ON EMOTIONAL HEALTH



“Cyber void is so full of amazing emptiness
that makes us feel fulfilled.”

-- Munia Khan

Turner (2017) eloquently writes of his own struggle with depression secondary to media overconsumption, *“My relationship with the Internet was not alleviating feelings of loneliness; it was amplifying my loneliness, bringing me to a state of frustrated depression. I felt boxed in, unable to breathe, trapped in an inescapable thought bubble of my own f*ed up,*

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addictive desires. I conditioned myself to need constant stimulation. I couldn't read, talk, study, or play the piano – all things that I love – because it all seemed too slow, too one-note...I was always tired, yet always racing in a mad frenzy. I couldn't focus. I was anxious. I was unable to engage in solitude. My thoughts were a jumble.”

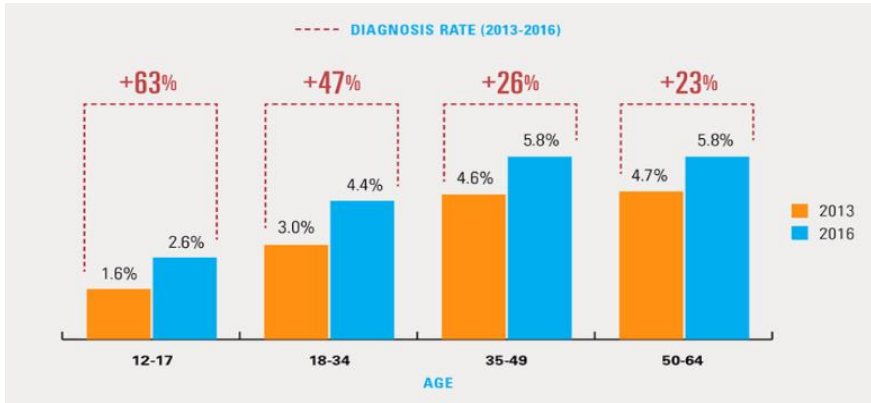
On the surface level, we are the most connected society that has ever walked the planet. Each second, we send over 7,500 tweets, 1,394 Instagram photos, and over two million emails and view over 119,000 YouTube videos (Internet Live Stats, 2014). Americans send 69,000 texts a second, translating to over six billion texts sent out in the US daily. Paradoxically, the more **connected** we think we are with the façade of the Internet, the more **disconnected** and depressed we actually become. As Johann Hari (2015) said in a Ted Talk, “We are the most disconnected society that has ever been, surely.” Dr. Jean Twenge, a San Diego State University professor, and the author of her compelling book, *Generation Me*, analyzed the data from approximately six million teens and adults in the US and concluded that self-reported depression has increased markedly since the 1980s. She found that teens, in particular, are 74 percent more likely to exhibit difficulty sleeping and are twice as likely to seek help from a mental health professional (Twenge, 2014). Farchian (2016) reported that people are ten times more likely to suffer from depression today than in post-WWII, with women and teenage girls more than doubly prone to depression than men.

A 2018 study conducted by Blue Cross - Blue Shield revealed that the highest rate of growth in depression has occurred in the youngest and the most digitally connected age bracket (see chart below). “The most dramatic rise in major depression diagnosis is among those under 35 years of age. Between 2013 and 2016 diagnoses increased

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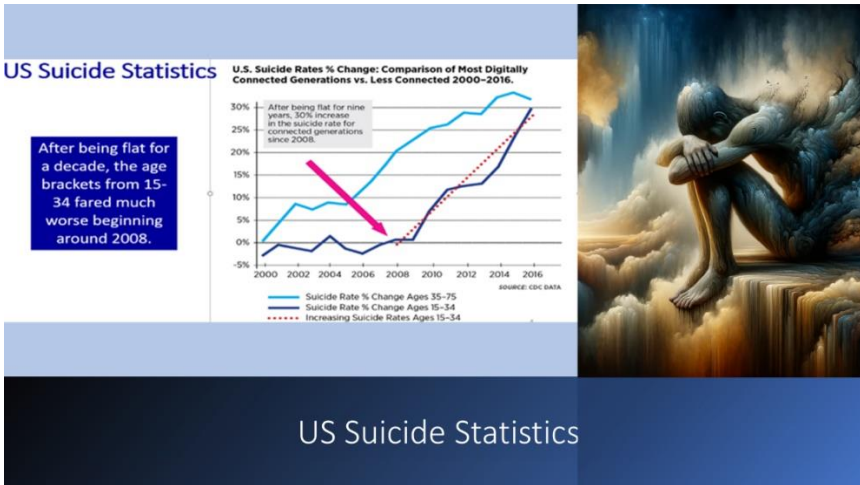
63% among adolescents and 47% among millennials. Gender differences among millennials were similar but among adolescents, there was a 65% increase for girls compared to a 47% rise for boys” (Blue Cross and Blue Shield, 2018).



The CDC recently reported that the suicide rate among the “Most Digitally Connected Generations” has increased at an alarming rate in the last 10 years after being flat for nine years. This 30% increase in suicide correlates with the advent of the smart phone (see graph below).

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Shared with permission – Peter Ryan, CAPT, USN (R)

The connection between general media consumption, including gaming and social media, and depression is well-established.

Kardaras (2016) cites the following concerning statistics:

- A 1998 study at Carnegie Mellon University found that web use over a two-year period correlated with increased depression, feelings of loneliness, and a loss of “real-world” friends.
- A 2012 Missouri State University study of 216 students revealed that 30% of Internet users showed signs of depression and that the depressed kids were more intense Web users.
- A 2014 study looked at 2,293 seventh-graders and found that Internet addiction led to increased depression, hostility, and anxiety.
- A 2014 study conducted in Pakistan with 300 graduate students found a positive correlation between Internet addiction and depression and anxiety.

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- A 2006 Korean study involving 1,573 high school students found a correlation with Internet addiction, depression, and thoughts of suicide.

Recently, the term **Facebook Depression** has emerged – namely, the more “friends” one has on Facebook, the higher the likelihood of depressive symptoms (Kardaras, 2016). Kardaras (2016) notes that this is a double whammy in that the more time spent on social media and the more texting an individual engages in, the higher the probability of both depression and a media addiction as well, which, in turn, only increases a sense of isolation and disconnection from healthy living. Kardaras (2016) cites a Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine study that “hypernet workers” were prone toward (Pederson, 2015):

- Higher rates of depression
- Increased substance abuse
- Poor sleep
- Greater reported stress
- Poor academic performance
- Higher rates of suicide
- 69% more likely to have sex
- 60% more likely to report four or more sexual partners
- 84% more likely to have used illegal drugs
- 94% more likely to have been in a physical fight

Dr. David Skinner, a sexual addiction expert, wrote about a non-peer-reviewed online study in his blog comprising 450 subjects, mostly men, and found that individuals who viewed pornography three to five times per week and/or daily scored much higher on a standard measurement for depression and included it as part of a free online survey found at growthclimate.com. The individuals who viewed pornography three to five times per day scored on average nearly 15

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on the depression survey, and those who viewed it daily scored on average 21 compared to the general population score of 6.5.

As noted in MentalHelp.net (2016), researchers have concluded that compulsive and at-risk cybersex users experience guilt, depression, and anxiety. The writers conclude that this may both result from pornography usage and perpetuate further behavior.

Weaver et al. (2011) found that adult users of pornographic material reported greater depressive symptoms, poorer quality of life, more mental- and physical-health diminished days, and lower health status than compared to nonusers.

Dr. Gail Dines, perhaps the leading advocate against the impact of the pornography industry in the world, is President and CEO of Culture Reframed, and Professor Emerita of Sociology and Women's Studies Wheelock College, Boston. Having researched and written about the porn industry for over twenty years, Dr. Dines is internationally acclaimed as the leading expert on how pornography shapes our identities, culture, and sexuality. She is a consultant to government agencies in the US and abroad, including the UK, Norway, Iceland, and Canada. In 2008, she co-founded the nonprofit Stop Porn Culture. Her website holds a wealth of information and specifically summarizes the impact of pornography on children and teens. In her extensive review of the literature, Dr. Dines notes on her website (<https://www.culturereframed.org/>) that studies indicate that porn users experience:

- Higher incidence of depressive symptoms
- Lower degrees of social integration
- Decreased emotional bonding with caregivers
- Increased conduct problems

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- Higher levels of delinquent behavior

Doornwaard et al. (2016) conducted a study comprised of 331 Dutch boys and determined that compulsive pornography consumption correlated with higher levels of depressive feelings and lower self-esteem.

Owens et al. (2012) and Sun et al. (2016) determined that pornography impacts self-image, specifically regarding feelings of physical inferiority; for girls, this relates to feelings of physical inferiority, and for boys, fear of not measuring up, with concerns about both virility and performance.

THE IMPACT OF

PORNOGRAPHY ON SEXUAL AGGRESSION



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Cited in In his book, *How Pornography Harms*, Dr. Foubert (2017) notes over **100 studies** show that pornography is correlated with and is the cause of a **wide range of violent behaviors** and about **50 studies** that show a strong relationship between pornography and **sexual violence** (Peter et al., 2016 & Malamuth, 2000). Kingston et al. (2009) write that researchers have also found that pornography use specifically increases the likelihood that a man will commit acts of sexual violence against women, especially if the man in question has additional risk factors such as impulsivity and if the pornography use is frequent.

Foubert (2017) and Dr. Mary Ann Layden found evidence of increased violent acts toward women by males who consume pornography. She comments that men are much more prone to be both physically and sexually aggressive toward women if they are hostile in attitude toward women, promiscuous sexually, and frequent consumers of pornography. She summarizes her findings by stating that pornography teaches, gives permission, and eventually triggers attitudes and behaviors that are destructive to both the user and others. The damage is evident regardless of sex or of age. In her own words, “Pornography is a widely influential and very **toxic teacher**” Layden, 2010).

Donevan et al. (2017) conducted a mixed-gender Swedish study of 946 students. They found that frequent users who watched hardcore and violent pornography to a higher extent were more likely to have engaged in a wider range of sexual activities, fantasized about trying sexual activities seen in hardcore pornography, and showed signs of sexual preoccupation and problematic pornography use.

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Owens et al. (2012) and Sun et al. (2016) reported that research findings consistently link the viewing of violent pornography to increased tendencies for sexually aggressive behavior

Stanley et al. (2016) reported a clear association between regular viewing of online pornography and perpetration of sexual coercion and abuse by boys. In addition, they determined that regularly watching pornography and sending or receiving sexual images or messages were associated with the increased probability of being a perpetrator of sexual coercion.

Dr. Walther DeKeseredy (2016) reported that among divorced people he studied, 30% stated that their husband's pornography use was integral to the sexual abuse they suffered in their marriage.

Wright et al. (2016) conducted an excellent and exhaustive meta-analysis of 22 studies from seven different countries and concluded, *"The accumulated data leave little doubt that, on the average, individuals who consume pornography more frequently are more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression and engage in actual acts of sexual aggression than individuals who do not consume pornography or who consume pornography less frequently."*

The **Catholic News Agency** reported shocking interviews of serial killers that pornography can lead to the ultimate crime: Murder. They are summarized below and are horrific to read.

Gary Bishop, Serial Killer

Gary Bishop, a convicted homosexual pedophile, murdered five young boys in Salt Lake City, Utah, to conceal his sexual abuse of them. After his conviction, he wrote a letter which revealed that

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pornography and his addiction to it was the root cause of his murders. It said:

"Pornography was a determining factor in my downfall. Somehow, I became sexually attracted to young boys, and I would fantasize about them naked. Certain bookstores offered sex education photographs or art books, which occasionally contained pictures of nude boys. I purchased such books and used them to enhance my masturbatory fantasies.

"But it wasn't enough. I desired more sexually arousing pictures, so I enticed boys to let me take pictures of them naked. From adult magazines, I located companies specializing in kiddie porn."

"Such material would temporarily satisfy my cravings, but soon I would need pictures more explicit and revealing ... Finding and procuring sexually arousing materials became an obsession. For me, seeing pornography was like lighting a fire on a stick of dynamite. I became stimulated and had to gratify my urges or explode (Cline, 1999).

Ted Bundy, Serial Killer

Serial killer Ted Bundy killed at least 28 young women and girls. He was interviewed by Dr. James Dobson, a well-known psychologist, the day before he was executed. Bundy told Dobson, "I encountered softcore porn in the local drugstore (and later) came across pornographic books of a harder nature."

Dr. Dobson asked whether these included violence. Bundy answered, "Yes, and this is something I want to emphasize as the most damaging kind of pornography."

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Dobson asked if "it fulfilled your fantasies." Bundy said:

"In the beginning, it fuels this kind of thought process. Then, at a certain time, it's instrumental in what I would say crystallizing it ... At that point ... I was on the verge of acting out these kinds of thoughts ... and it happened in stages ... my experience with pornography that deals on a violent level with sexuality is that once you become addicted ... I would keep looking for more explicit, more graphic kinds of materials ... until you reach the point where the pornography only goes so far. You reach that jumping-off point where you begin to wonder if maybe actually doing it will give you that which is beyond just reading about it or looking at it. ..."

Bundy continues:

"The influence of violent pornography-which is an indispensable link in the chain of behavior ... the assaults, the murders and what have you ... I know that I could not control it ... that these barriers that I had learned as a child were not enough to hold me back with respect to seeking out and harming somebody."

Bundy then says:

"I think people need to recognize that those of us who have been influenced by ... pornographic violence-are not some kind of inherent monsters. We are your sons, and we are your husbands. ... Any pornography can reach out and snatch a kid out of any house today."

"I've lived in prison for a long time ... and I've met a lot of men who were motivated to commit violence just like me. And without exception every one of them was deeply involved in pornography -- deeply influenced by an addiction. There is no question about it. The

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FBI's own study shows that the most common interest among serial killers is pornography." (Dobson interview, 1989).

Jeffrey Dahmer, Serial Killer

Jeffrey Dahmer drugged and killed 17 men and boys. As related in a confession to the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, Dahmer reported that he often had sex with the body. When asked what motivated him, he told the FBI in 1992, *"heavy drinking, pornography, and masturbation"* -- admitting while in the U.S. Army he found graphic porn in Germany and spent thousands of dollars on it. He admitted to killing as often as once a week. (APB News, 2000).

The Impact of Pornography on Sexuality:



Listed below are some of the impacts that pornography has on sexuality.

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Inability to achieve orgasm during sex: Gary Wilson (2017) in *Your Brain on Porn*, one of the best books on the neurological impact of pornography addiction, writes that years of porn use can cause a variety of sexual symptoms which lie on a spectrum. Often, porn users report that delayed ejaculation or inability to orgasm (anorgasmia) was a prelude to full blown erectile dysfunction.

Citing one 29 year-old young man from Gary Wilson's forum who stated, *"17 years of masturbation and 12 years of escalating to extreme/fetish porn. I started to lose interest in real sex. The buildup and release from porn became stronger than it was from sex. Porn offers unlimited variety. I could choose what I wanted to see in the moment. My delayed ejaculation during sex became so bad that sometimes I could not orgasm at all. This killed my last desire to have sex"* (Wilson, 2017, p. 41).

Unreliable erections during sexual encounters: Between 1948 and 2002, the historical rates for ED in men under 40 were consistently around **2% to 3%** and did not go up very much until age 40. (de Boer et al (2004). However, as noted by Wilson (2017), at least six studies have found erectile dysfunction (ED) rates of about **14% to 33%** in young men, which constitutes a staggering 1000% increase in just the last 15 years (Park, 2016). In fact, adolescents are suffering disproportionately, as noted in a Canadian study, which showed that problems in sexual functioning are sadly higher in adolescent males than in adult males. In a two-year period 78.6% of **males aged 16-21** reported a sexual problem during partnered sexual activity (O'Sullivan et. al., 2016):

- Erectile dysfunction - 45%
- Low sexual desire - 46%

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- Difficulty climaxing – 24%

As noted by Steinberg et al. (2013), dopamine is odd in that it shoots up when something is better than expected (violates expectations), but only drops when expectations are not met. Wilson (2017) adds, *“With sex, it’s nearly impossible to match internet porn’s level of surprise, variety, and novelty. Thus, once a man thoroughly conditions himself to porn, sex may not meet his unconscious expectations. Unmet expectations produce a drop in dopamine – and erections. (A steady stream of dopamine surges is imperative for sustaining arousal and erections). Whether 25 or 55, the disparity between real sex and masturbating to Internet porn is a key factor in porn-induced sexual dysfunctions”* (Wilson, 2017, pp 84-85).

Scary and alarming porn fetish tastes: Gary Wilson (2017) writes that once upon a time, men could trust their penises to tell them everything they needed to know about their sexual preferences and orientation. However, our brains are very plastic (or able to change with experience). As such, our brains change with experience with or without our conscious participation. Wilson notes, that as a function of porn involvement, porn users often move from one genre to another and will often arrive in place they find very disturbing and/or confusing. As a result, a previously defined heterosexual boy might ultimately find himself enjoying homosexual pornography and then begin to question his sexuality. Additionally, many men end up viewing child pornography as they have habituated to everything else. As has been said, *“I did it all and then got bored (habituated) with it all and thus (child porn) was the final taboo that excited me.*

Another young man cited in Wilson (2017), stated, *“I wasn’t interested in any weird stuff before I started to watch porn. Just real*

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girls of my age. Now, I like BBB, BBW, MILF, Tranny, Crossdresser, Fat, Skinny, and Teen.”

Downing et al. (2016) conducted a study that found that it is now quite common to find men who view porn to be inconsistent with their identified sexuality. Specifically, they reported that heterosexual-identified men in the study reported viewing porn containing male same-sex behavior (20.7%), and gay-identified men reported viewing heterosexual behavior in porn (55%). Wilson (2017) notes that it is very sad that porn users are ignorant of how common it is to escalate, often leaving porn users in the end, feeling very anxious, demoralized, and hopeless. He adds that it can be especially distressing to escalate through **porn fetishes** that ultimately cast doubt on one’s sexual orientation.

THE IMPACT OF

PORNOGRAPHY ON THE OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN



His Porn,
Her Pain

Dr. Foubert (2017) writes that the root of many acts of violence against women, including sexual violence, lies in a process in which a person sees another person as more of an object than a flesh-and-blood human being. In an effort to study this process, a research team from the Netherlands investigated the relationship between adolescents viewing pornography and whether or not they ended up believing that

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women were more objects than real people. The results revealed that the more younger males and females viewed porn, the more they took on a mindset that females, indeed, are objects (Peter et al., 2007; 2009).

In a review of previous studies on the objectification of women, Klassen and Peter (2015) noted that Internet pornography promotes gender inequality between the sexes because it treats women as sex objects, subordinates them, and depicts rape and violence against them. They conducted a content analysis of 400 popular pornographic Internet videos from the most visited pornographic websites and concluded that objectification was depicted more often for women than for men, and men were shown as dominant and women as submissive.

Instead of women being seen as lovely and beautiful human beings, they are now far too often being devalued to nothing more than an object to satisfy basic animal desires that are triggered and then played out online. Men ask of their partners, and I use that term loosely, to play out their fantasies as spawned by what they have previously seen. There is little to no interest in satisfying the desires of their partners and leaving them happy and fulfilled. Sex is, hence, far too dopamine-driven, with too little **oxytocin**. Oxytocin has been called the **“love hormone”** that also acts as a powerful neurotransmitter in the brain. The body releases oxytocin during physical touch and skin-to-skin contact, such as hugging, cuddling, kissing, and other sexual behaviors. Oxytocin brings on feelings of calmness, security, and contentment—feelings often associated with pair bonding. Oxytocin activates brain areas associated with pleasure and reward, likely because the body releases dopamine in coordination with oxytocin as the result of physical touch. Oxytocin

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also plays a role in pregnancy, nursing, and mother-infant attachment (The Neurobiology of Romantic Love, 2018).

THE IMPACT OF PORNORGRAPHY ON THE SOUL

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness.”

- Matthew 6:22-23 NIV



Although we stated earlier in this paper, I do not ascribe to **blaming and shaming** and do not believe that most people fall into addictive patterns primarily as a function of moral failure, I do think that the pursuit of pornography most

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inevitably leads us down a path that precipitates the **demise of the soul.**

The Jewish tradition reminds us that a core belief in Judaism is that man and woman are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Judaism sanctions, indeed hallows, the positive enjoyment of sexuality within the context of an overall relationship between husband and wife. Pornography represents the very antithesis of that tradition. It makes people into objects by reducing sex to an impersonal, mechanical activity. It denies the image of God within us.

Pastor Driscoll (1989) notes that God tells us that people tend to satisfy their thirst not by drinking from His streams of living water but instead by drinking from manmade toilets. As a result, we lose what could have brought us refreshment and instead ingest a poison that ultimately blackens us.

Aside from the question of sin, the Catechism of the Catholic Church notes another closely allied principle, which we call "Morality." We first observe that there is a wide belief that "Deep within his conscience, man discovers a law he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice calls him to love to do good and avoid evil. It is sometimes called natural law and allows him or her to recognize the moral quality of any act, whether good or bad. Conscience and the ability to seek good and avoid evil is inscribed in his heart by God" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992). When we go against this principle, we can degrade that voice and lose a higher guidance that serves to protect us. In so doing, the descent to darkness accelerates to the point that those who love us, and we as well, no longer know the person we have become.

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Dr. Dindinger (2014) writes about hypofrontality, as discussed earlier in this book. He notes, “Many who reach this stage find that they are seeking and engaging in pornography even when they do not want to. Individuals who are trying to quit viewing and engaging in pornography often report that they are unable to stop themselves and feel like they are on autopilot. In some ways, their ability to choose is gone. When these areas of the brain are shut down, other damaging activities occur...Morals begin to change...In these situations, people tend to change their moral structure to include pornography as an acceptable behavior...The end result is that all

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actions that support the view that pornography is bad are then judged to be irrelevant and wrong...Many people turn away from monogamous relationships, marriage, religious activities, family, 'judgmental friends,' and other forms of pleasure in favor of pornography" (Dindinger, 2014, p 7-8)

To summarize, the impact of pornography on the soul is profound and can lead to the following:

1. **Loss of spiritual integrity**: Specifically, many spiritual and religious traditions emphasize purity of thought and action as a cornerstone of moral living. In these contexts, pornography is often seen as a violation of these principles, leading to a sense of spiritual corruption or impurity. This sense of having compromised one's moral or spiritual ideals can lead to feelings of intense guilt, shame, and a perceived and painful distance from the divine or a higher moral standard.
2. **Erosion of Virtue and Self-Control**: Many spiritual traditions stress the importance of self-control, discipline, and the pursuit of virtue. Pornography addiction can be seen as a failure in self-control, which can have broader spiritual implications, and this loss of control might be viewed as a weakening of the soul's ability to resist temptation and pursue a life aligned with higher spiritual values.
3. **Distortion of Human Dignity and Love**: From a spiritual perspective, human sexuality is seen by many as a sacred expression of love that affirms human dignity. Pornography, by contrast, is criticized for objectifying individuals, as noted earlier, and reducing them to mere instruments of pleasure. This objectification can be seen as a violation of the spiritual

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principle that views every person as having inherent worth and dignity. Regular consumption of pornography very likely desensitizes an individual to these spiritual values, leading to a degraded understanding of love and respect.

4. **Impact on Spiritual Growth:** Engaging in behaviors perceived as spiritually harmful can hinder personal spiritual growth. Individuals who feel addicted to pornography often report a sense of stagnation in their spiritual lives, feeling trapped in a cycle that is at odds with their spiritual aspirations. This can lead to a feeling of disconnection from their spiritual journey and a struggle to find meaning and purpose.
5. **Effect on Meditation and Prayer:** For those who engage in practices like prayer and meditation as part of their spiritual life, pornography addiction can be particularly disruptive. The intrusive thoughts and guilt associated with the addiction can become obstacles to achieving the peace, focus, and connection with the divine that these practices are meant to cultivate.

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Which path do you choose to take?

IDEOLOGICAL PATHWAY

TO THE SEXIFICATION OF CHILDREN

“The truth knocks on the door, and you say, ‘Go away, I’m looking for the truth,’ and so it goes away. Puzzling.”

- Robert M. Pirsig

Although perhaps risky in today’s environment, I would be remiss if no effort was made to comment on current ideological trends that are impacting how we educate our children and what we are freely allowing institutions to expose them to.

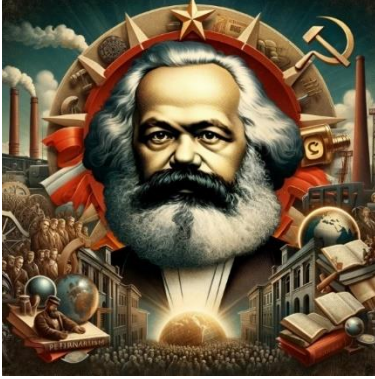


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To that end, a bit of history:

Karl Marx and Classical Marxism:



Melvin Tinker (2020), former Vicar of St. John Newland, Hull, England, and prolific author who passed away from cancer in 2021, wrote in his excellent book, *That Hideous Strength: A Deeper Look at How the West Was Lost*, that one of the main ideologies of our day is a variant of naturalistic materialism or neo-

Marxism, which is now often called cultural Marxism or libertarian Marxism.

In order to understand more fully what is “new” or “neo” about this brand of Marxism, Tinker (2020) explains, “It is important to provide a basic sketch of classical Marxism from which it derived. He adds that Marx and his partner Frederick Engels wrote their famous or, dare I say, infamous, *The Communist Manifesto* in 1948. Marx disagreed with the great German idealist philosopher, G.W.F. Hegel (1770 – 1831), who asserted that all reality was the outworking of the Absolute Spirit through nature, history, or human mind and, for Hegel, religion itself was the ‘self-consciousness’ of God. In other words, everything we experience is part of the process of divine evolution, which is, in essence, inexorable and progressive. Marx agreed that our identity as human beings was construed in terms of our human relationships; however, Marx did not believe those relationships were determined by ‘Spirit’ but rather by the ‘material’, and more specifically, our place in an economy.

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For Marx, the fundamental human problem was comprised of two things: oppression and alienation (Tinker, 2020) and oppression resulting from living in a capitalist society that was exploitative and unjust as the bourgeoisie (or ruling class) owned the means of production, which, in turn, used and abused the proletariat (working class) to line its own coffers. This resulted in the working class experiencing a fourfold alienation:

1. From the act of production
2. From the product made
3. From other workers
4. From his identity.

Marx revealed his untoward intention to turn society on its heels in the Communist Manifesto, writing, “There is only one way in which the murderous death agonies of the old society and the bloody birth throes of the new society can be shortened, simplified, and concentrated, and that way is revolutionary terror (Smith, 2020). Smith elaborated that Marx believed this would eventually end in a classless Utopia after the bourgeois were violently overthrown. Marx surmised that communist revolutions would first take place in Europe, led by awakened industrial workers. Of course, as we know, this did not happen. In Russia and China, the Communist Revolution was led by intellectuals and supported mostly by peasants (Smith, 2020).

Antonio Gramsci and Cultural Hegemony:

Marxist devotees attempted to make sense as to why the industrial workers failed to bring revolution in Europe and America, and why only a small minority were truly radicalized. Some of the answers

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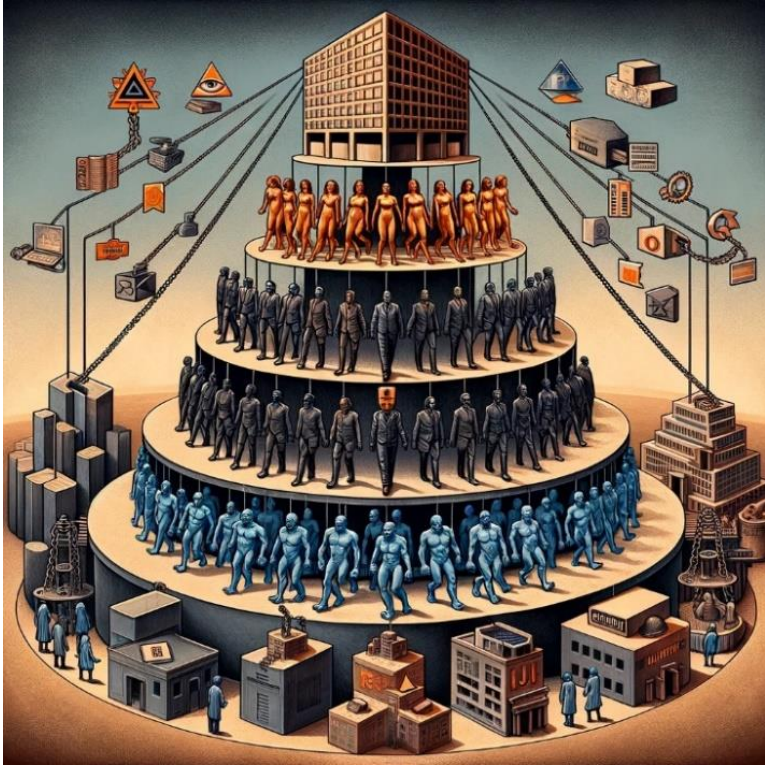
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were provided by the Italian Communist **Antonio Gramsci** (1891-1937), who died young but left an extremely influential set of writings known as the *“Prison Notebooks,”* written while he was in one of Mussolini’s prisons. Reflecting on his Catholic youth, Gramsci concluded that the issue that prevented workers from becoming communists, as Marx had predicted, was that the culture was, for the most part, Christian and held onto its Judeo-Christian values and ethics. This would always impede and stop the spread of communism. His solution was not a frontal attack on the church, as was happening in Russia, but rather a slow takeover of church institutions and government agencies.

Tinker (2020) notes that in contrast to Marx, Gramsci believed ideas shaped economies rather than the converse. In addition, he did not suggest a violent overthrow, as did Marx, but supported change by capturing it through the infiltration of culture by overtaking key culture-making institutions, such as churches, schools, media, police, the judicial system, civil services, etc. He coined the term, Hegemony (from Greek Hegemon, which means ruler), which refers to the dominant class’s exertion of control and influence over the people by oppressive cultural ideas and norms and advocated for the abolition of those norms. This is essentially what the German student, Rudi Dutschke, of the 1960’s, AKA “Red Rudi,” referred to as “The Long Walk through the Institutions.”

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This image shows a hierarchical arrangement of figures and symbols representing the influence of the ruling class over various aspects of society (hegemony).

As Samuel Kronen (2006) wrote, “A low resolution interpretation of Marx, packaged in a very particular ideological framework is applied to all social problems. It is taking this discovery of the conflict between social classes that come up in the development of advanced civilizations and assigning the same conflict narrative to all categories of people, whether it be gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on (Kronen, cited by Tinker, 2020).

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The Frankfurt School:

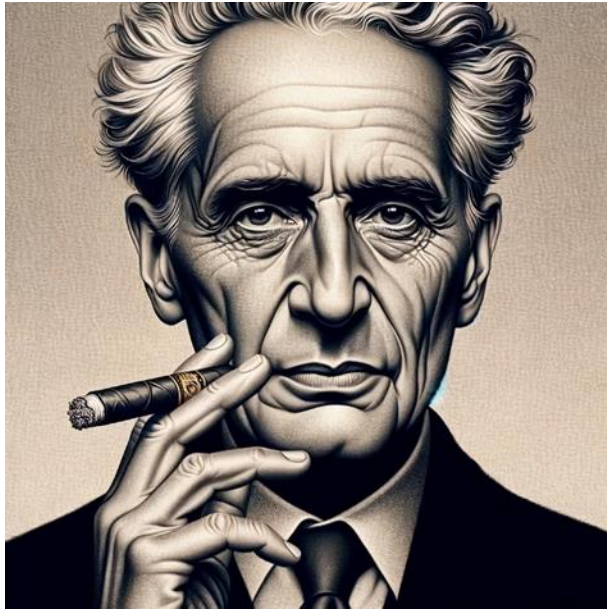


The Frankfurt School in Germany – Facsimile

The Frankfurt School also emerged in the early 20th century and was a group of scholars associated with the Institute for Social Research at the Goethe University Frankfurt. They were known for developing and contributing to critical theory. The primary goal of the Frankfurt School was to develop a comprehensive theory that could explain and critique the social structures of capitalist societies. This theory sought to identify the underlying social, economic, and political dynamics that shape societies. Some of the most prominent figures of the first generation of Critical Theorists were Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), Friedrich Pollock (1894-1970), Leo Lowenthal (1900-1993), and Eric Fromm (1900-1980).

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Herbert Marcuse 1955 - Facsimile

One of the key members of the Frankfurt School clan, **Herbert Marcuse**, wrote, “But society cannot be indiscriminate where the pacification of existence, where freedom and happiness themselves are at stake: here, certain things cannot be said, certain ideas cannot be expressed, certain policies cannot be proposed, certain behavior cannot be permitted without making tolerance an instrument for the continuation of servitude” (Marcuse, 1965). This clearly paved a path toward suppression of any opposing view and should be, in itself, totally terrifying, and clearly, we find ourselves today in just such a fix.

Michael Walsh writes in his book on the Frankfurt School, *The Devil’s Pleasure Palace: The Cult of Critical Theory and the Subversion of the West*, that Marcuse was very popular among student radicals in the 1960s and provided intellectual support for the Left’s counter-

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cultural movement of that era. Blending Marxist theory with Freudian psychoanalysis, Walsh notes that Marcuse argued that Judeo-Christian culture repressed perfectly natural sexual urges and that true liberation required freeing society from those restraints. Those ideas helped to fuel the notions that “if it feels good, do it” and “make love, not war” that became popular slogans of campus leftists. This thinking left a very negative mark on our youth back then and is alive and well now (Walsh, 2017).

Walsh adds that Marcuse also helped to lay the intellectual groundwork for the Left’s repression of opposing speech in his classic 1965 treatise, *Repressive Tolerance*. The essential [argument](#), according to Marcuse, is that, because the existing system is intolerant by the Left’s standards, true tolerance requires suppression of ideas and movements on the Right and acceptance only of those on the Left. (Walsh, 2017). Sadly, it is my belief and that of many others that this perspective has permeated the medical world specifically, and research that promotes a more conservative and cautious approach to transitioning children too early is suppressed. Authors are often even punished by having their reputations smeared if not completely destroyed.

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Eric Fromm - Facsimile

Erich Fromm was another key figure in the Frankfurt School and was known for his synthesis of Marx and Freud, and the development of Marxian social psychology. His affiliation with the Institute for Social Research, which was the hub of the Frankfurt School, spanned from 1928 to 1938. Fromm's work combined Freudian psychology with Marxian social theory. Fromm argued that sexual orientation was merely a social construct and asserted that there are no innate differences between men and women, and sexuality and gender roles are socially determined. **William Reich** similarly synthesized Marx with Freud and coined the term, “the sexual revolution,” which became the title of his 1945 book. (Reich, 1945). He specifically contended that innate sexual impulses should be liberated from man-made moral restrictions (Tinker, 2020). One can again easily see how removing these social/cultural mores helps pave the way to promote ideas that children should be allowed to go whatever path they choose in pursuit of whatever “feels right.”

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Queer Theory:

As noted in an article posted in *Libraries: Indiana University Bloomington* (2023), Queer Theory is an interdisciplinary field that suggests that we look at the world through new avenues. It is a way of thinking that completely dismantles traditional assumptions about gender and sexual identities, challenges traditional academic approaches, and fights against social inequality.

Informal use of the term “queer theory” began in the 1990s with its roots from scholars, such as **Michel Foucault's** 1976, who wrote **The History of Sexuality**, which proposed that identity is not innate and that sexuality is only a social construct. In 1984, Gayle Rubin later published the influential essay **Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality**, which criticized the value system that societies attribute to sexuality and sexual practices. In 1990, **Judith Butler** published **Gender Trouble**, developing the theory of gender performance.



Michel Foucault - Facsimile

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One might make an argument that in challenging some of the traditional values of sexuality, Queer Theory advocates took a bridge too far. Dr. Em (pseudonym), in her series of essays, *The Trojan Unicorn: Queer Theory and Paedophilia*, bravely wrote a critique of Queer Theory and its most ardent supporters, citing their original writing and exposing just how radical this theory really is and how dangerous this is to the safety of our children.

Dr. Em (2019a) notes that Queer Theory was built on the philosophical traditions known as poststructuralism and postmodernism. **Foucault** advanced the position that power is relational and ubiquitous, and rather than being dictated from above and unilateral, he claimed that power and prohibition were movable and pervasive. Foucault adds that this means that the harm of rape, for example, is how we discursively construct a victim and an offender rather than the physical act itself. Moreover, transgression of norms, and, in particular, sexual norms, becomes the only response to punishment and classification, which would, in Foucauldian thinking, challenge oppression and power. Some welcomed Foucault's challenge to heteronormative dominance. However, the extension of his idea that **all norms** are bad and freeing repressed deviant sexualities is a good thing is a bridge too far for many, including me. Shockingly, Foucault went on to advocate for and sign a petition to the French Parliament in 1977, arguing for the abolition of all legislation regarding the age of consent, or the effective legalization of pedophilia. One year later, in 1978, Foucault participated in a radio broadcast, which once again argued that age of consent legislation should be abolished and that children's sexuality and suppressed desire for sex with adults should be acknowledged. Moreover, Foucault purported in an interview, "The child with his own sexuality may have desired that adult (making

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sexual advances), he may even have consented, he may even have made the first moves. We may even agree that he may have even made the first moves.” (Em, 2019a).



Judith Butler Facsimile

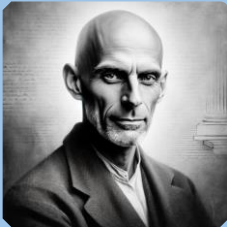
Dr. Em further exposed previously mentioned **Judith Butler**, the American philosopher and gender theorist, born in 1956, best known for her influential work in gender studies and critical theory. Her seminal book "Gender Trouble," published in 1990, introduced the idea that gender is performative, meaning it is constructed through repeated actions rather than being innate. Butler's theories have significantly impacted queer theory, feminist theory, and cultural studies (Duignan, 2023). Dr. Em aptly refers to Butler as the “high Priestess of queer theory gibberish.” Em explains, “In her magnum opus of flimflam, *Gender Trouble*, Butler postulated that the incest taboo is the juridical law that aids both to prohibit incestuous desires and to construct certain gendered subjectivities through the mechanism of compulsory identification.” Butler promoted “the legitimacy and legality of public zones of sexual exchange, intergenerational sex, adoption outside of marriage, increased

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research and testing for AIDS and gender policies. As well as opposing the legal restrictions against intrafamilial child sexual abuse, Butler claimed that the law against incest actually produces incest and the desire to sexually abuse children (Em, 2019b).

It can be argued that untethering all forms of protection of sexuality toward children and giving attribution to them at young ages that they know what is healthy, might help to pave the way for children to make decisions about their sexual identity far too early when they do not appreciate the consequences of such decision. As we can see, Queer Theory involves a critique of all that used to be labelled ‘normal’ when it comes to sexuality and gender, and it has crowned the transsexual community as the heroes of our time (Edsinger, 2023).



The more radical neo-Marxist ideologies are putting our children in peril

- [Michel Foucault](#), a well-known French philosopher, historian of ideas, writer, political activist, and literary critic advocated for abolishing age of consent laws and was in favor of adults having sex with minors.



- [Judith Butler](#) serves as a Distinguished Professor in the Graduate School at the University of California, Berkeley and favored sexual freedom with children and reportedly defended incest. Furthermore, she did this without making a single reference to the fact that most familial child sexual abuse is by a male relative to a female child.

So, the pathway to confusing our children in their identity becomes clearer:

1. Create a new ideology that, under the cloak of making us all equal, forces us to accept that ideology as defined by the man

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defining that ideology. If you refuse, you are destroyed, even killed. **That is Classical Marxism.**

2. Appreciate that this new way of thinking, to more fully take root, must change every aspect of existing culture. **That is hegemony per Antonio Gramsci.**
3. Disrespect and criticize every foundational cultural tradition or mores. **That is Critical Theory as promulgated by the Frankfurt School.**
4. Turn upside down commonsense sexual behavior and legitimize the perverse. **That is (radical) Queer Theory.**

So, exposing children to pornography at an early age is an acceptable way to destabilize normative development and usher into their developing psyches new and aberrant ways of thinking about their sexuality. Once off-balance, they are open to whatever the ideologues wish to program them with. To summarize my concerns:

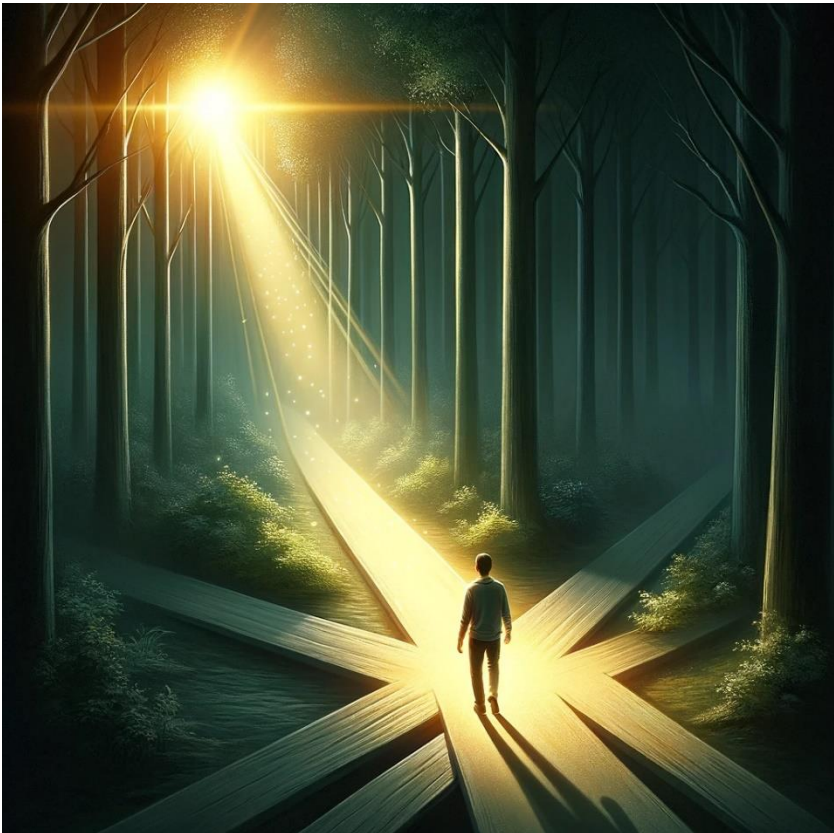
1. Such content might present unrealistic or unhealthy views of sexuality, which could lead children to develop distorted perceptions of sexual norms and behaviors.
2. Early exposure to sexual content might lead to premature sexualization of children that will impact their emotional and psychological development.
3. Exposure to explicit material can distract students from academic pursuits, which could affect their concentration and performance in school.

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4. Exposure can lead to an increased risk of children developing addictive behaviors towards such content, which may lead to other risky behaviors like early sexual activity or misuse of the internet, as noted earlier in this book.
5. Such exposure can contribute to mental health issues in children, including anxiety, depression, and body image issues, as noted earlier.
6. Without appropriate context and education, explicit content might not convey to the child/teen the importance of consent and safety in sexual relationships, leading to misconceptions.
7. This exposure can lead to conflicts between what children learn at home and what they are exposed to in school, potentially creating significant trust issues between parents and educational institutions.
8. Children exposed to such content might feel pressured to conform to the behaviors depicted, which could impact their social interactions and self-esteem.
9. Schools displaying explicit content might surely face legal and ethical challenges and lawsuits, especially if the content is not age-appropriate or not aligned with community standards.

THE WAY OUT



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The good news is that there is a way out if you want it bad enough and if you are willing to do the hard work.

Let's start with what does not work. Most important is **shame**. Telling yourself or another person who is struggling with pornography addiction that you or they are a moral failure or a bad person, will not help you or them heal and, in fact, can very often make matters far worse. I have seen porn-addicted people in my practice who have attempted suicide by hanging and/or by handguns because they were so wracked with guilt and shame, they tragically felt that the only escape was death.

Please know that you have already taken the first step by reading this book or any other good reference on behavioral addiction. As you are now coming to understand how you can be predisposed to addiction by your childhood experiences and how your brain and your central nervous system are being affected by your addiction, you can begin to have a sense of control over your addiction. Barta (2018) makes the very important point that addiction is no longer an outside force that is happening to you, as you can now understand that your addiction has been used to control painful feelings and/or disconnection through dissociated actions and behaviors. You can, therefore, begin to let go of the shame, embrace self-compassion and accept total responsibility for your healing.

Strategy One – Get Connected to Healthy Living

So, as we look toward solutions to getting our pornography consumption under control, we must have a template for what healthy living looks like. One of the most influential books I have found to address this issue is the groundbreaking book, *Lost Connections* by Johann Hari (2018). In this book, award-winning

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journalist, and critical thinker, Johann Hari, who suffered from depression since he was a child, set out on a three-year journey around the world to seek answers to his own depression. He talked with psychiatrists, epidemiologists, neurologists, neuroscientists, social scientists, and many other experts in their fields of study around the globe and explored different cultures and how they fared with these issues. In addition, he conducted a comprehensive review of the literature. He concluded that much of what we have been led to believe about the genesis and treatment of depression and anxiety is off the mark in many ways. He determined that in many cases, depression and anxiety are the result of crucial and growing problems with how we are living our lives. He discovered nine underlying causes of these problem, which are summarized as follows (Hari, 2018):

Cause One - Disconnection from Meaningful Work:

Hari (2018) noted that the polling company Gallup conducted the most comprehensive study to date on work satisfaction/dissatisfaction between 2011 and 2012 to determine how people across the world felt about their work. Of the millions of workers across 142 countries, Gallop determined that only 13% reported that they were “engaged” with their work (Davies, 2016). On the other hand, 63% were “not engaged” - meaning no passion in one’s work. Finally, 24% were “actively disengaged” - which translates to acting-out their unhappiness. In sum, twice as many people hate their jobs as love their jobs. In an effort to better understand high rates of depression and suicide in civil servants,



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investigators determined that a **lack of control** and little connection between **effort** and **reward** were highly predictive (Marmot et al., 2002).

The above study suggests that as we wean ourselves from excessive media use, we need to develop a sense of empowerment, purpose, and accomplishment in what we do. If we are unhappy with our job, we can make changes to make it better. If that doesn't work, we can consider looking elsewhere. I see far too many unfulfilled people in my practice who come home from work and bathe themselves in social media and/or pornography to ease the pain. This is no more evident than in the military, where the demands are particularly stressful.

Cause Two – Disconnection from Meaningful People:

Dr. John Cacioppo et al. (2006, 2008, 2010), a neuroscience researcher, studied the impact that loneliness has on health. He and his colleagues determined that loneliness causes **cortisol** levels to go through the roof – as much as that caused by some of the most disturbing things that can ever happen in your life. As Hari (2018) summarizes Cacioppo's research, "Becoming acutely lonely, the experiment(s) found, was as stressful as experiencing a physical attack." Another

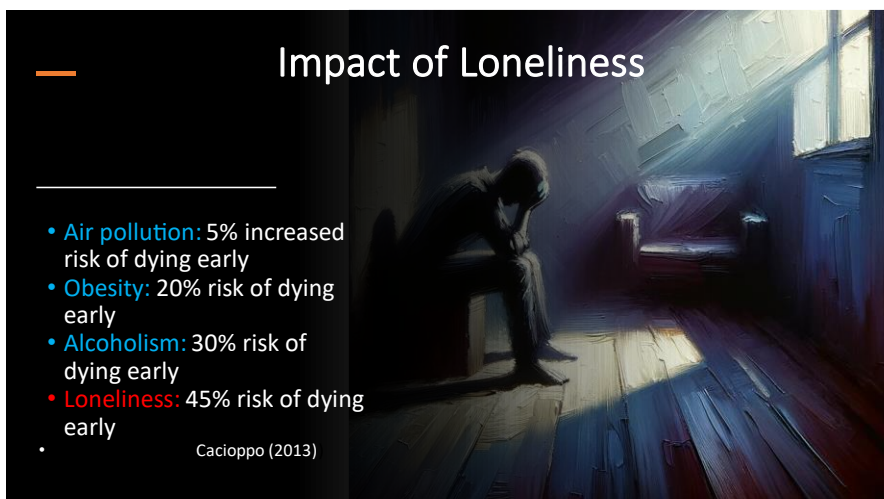


researcher, Lisa Bergman, followed both isolated and highly connected people over nine years and found that isolated people

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were two to three times more likely to die during lonely periods and that, specifically, almost everything during lonely periods becomes more fatal for lonely people, including heart disease, cancer, and respiratory problems (Pinker, 2015). In short, loneliness can be deadly (Monbiot, 2014). In addition, Cacioppo et al. (2010) conducted a five-year longitudinal study, which showed that loneliness is not merely the result of depression but indeed leads to depression as well. In this study, he found that on a measure of 0% loneliness to 100% loneliness, moving from 50% lonely to just 65% lonely increases your chances of becoming depressed by eight fold. He concluded that loneliness is causing a significant amount of depression and anxiety in our society. In a Ted Talk presentation, Cacioppo (2013) reported a rather shocking meta-analysis study of over 100,000 participants, which found increased risks of dying early due to the following:



Impact of Loneliness

- **Air pollution:** 5% increased risk of dying early
- **Obesity:** 20% risk of dying early
- **Alcoholism:** 30% risk of dying early
- **Loneliness:** 45% risk of dying early

• Cacioppo (2013)

A 2018 study conducted by Cigna (see diagram below) revealed that compared to older generations, the youngest is the loneliest generation ever (Cigna, 2018).

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Younger Generation is the Loneliest of all Generations



The implications of this research are clear; specifically, it is to our benefit that we stop isolating ourselves and connect in positive and fulfilling family and social relationships.

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Cause Three – Disconnection from Meaningful Values:



Family Values

Hari (2018) notes that an American psychologist, Tim Kasser, has spent much of his professional career investigating the impact that values have on our emotional and physical health. He specifically researched what philosophers had been suggesting for thousands of years - that if you overvalue money and possessions or if you think about life mainly in terms of how you look to other people, you will be unhappy (Belk, 1983). Kasser's research specifically determined that the more materialistic we are, the more likely we are to score higher on measures of depression. In his studies, materialistic people

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were having a tougher time with life in general. They tended to be sicker and angrier. “Something about a strong desire for materialistic pursuits,” Kasser wrote, “actually affected the participants’ day-to-day lives” (Kasser, 2002). Hari (2018) notes that materialistic values, which tell us to spend our way to happiness look like real values, yet they don’t give us what we need from values, namely, a path toward a satisfying and fulfilled life and instead fill us with “**psychological toxins,**” which can distort our minds.

In my family therapy sessions with media and porn addicted teens and young adults, I ask the family to define, evaluate, and clarify their family values and additionally determine what their family name means. In addition, I sometimes assign them to develop a family **Coat of Arms** (a pictorial symbol to identify their family values and what they stand for). Sadly, there is far too little discussion about family and personal values these days. Good values are like a compass that helps keep us on a “true north” path toward healthy living.

Cause Four – Disconnection from Childhood Trauma:

As noted earlier, childhood trauma is a leading reason why many turn to media and/or pornography in an effort to quell that pain. As such, unless that trauma is adequately addressed and resolved, efforts to stop our addictions can be much more difficult if not impossible. Moreover, many individuals with unresolved trauma may be successful in stopping one addiction but will only end up switching it out for another. As Johann Hari (2018) put it, “There’s a house fire inside many of us.”

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Cause Five – Disconnection from Status and Respect:



🌟 Status and Respect 🏆

Robert Sapolsky's baboon research revealed that baboons with the lowest status must compulsively show that they know that they are defeated. They do this by making subordinate gestures – lowering their heads, crawling on their bellies, etc. Moreover, when a baboon is looking and acting this way and when no one is showing him any respect, he will look a lot like a depressed person in that he will keep his head down, he will not want to move, he will lose his appetite and all energy, and when someone comes near him, he will pull away (Sapolsky, 1992, 2002). Sapolsky subsequently determined that depressed humans are flooded with the same stress hormone, namely cortisol, that low-ranking baboons experience and that the same constellation of changes in the brain and pituitary and adrenal glands also occur (Sapolsky, 1992, 2002).

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As noted earlier, spending much of the day in media does not afford us the necessary time and experience to build real 3D relationships, nor do we develop competence in a world that will ask much of us and, as a result, we will most assuredly lose “status and respect,” not only from others but we will also lose self-respect and self-confidence. We need to ensure that we are unplugging to develop those necessary skills. As Twenge (2006), in her book, *Generation Me*, astutely pointed out, self-esteem is not based on air, but on mastery and real-world competence.

Cause Six: Disconnection from the Natural World:

Our children no longer learn how to read
the great Book of Nature
From their own direct experience or how to interact creatively
with the seasonal transformations of the planet.
They seldom learn where their water comes from or where it goes.
We no longer coordinate our human celebration with
the great liturgy of the heavens.

-Wendell Berry



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Chilean primatologist, Isabel Behncke, has spent much of her professional career studying the behavior of chimpanzees and Bonobos in both the wild and in captivity. She noted that Bonobos in the wild can become sad or depressed, but there is a limit to how far they will go. However, in captivity, Bonobos often become so deeply depressed to the point that they will scratch themselves until they bleed and can develop tics or start to rock obsessively, whereas in their natural habitat, these behaviors are never observed (interview with Isabel Behncke cited in Hari, 2018). Elephants in captivity will often grind their tusks- which is a source of pride – against the walls to the point that they become stumps, and some elephants in captivity are so traumatized that they will actually sleep upright for years; all behaviors that are never seen in the wild (Sutherland, 2014). Isabel Behncke postulated that, similar to the animal world, we, too, are more prone toward depression when we starve ourselves from connection to the natural world (interview with Isabel Behncke cited in Hari, 2018). Berman (2012) conducted a study that asked city dwellers to simply take walks in nature and then tested their mood and concentration and predictably found that everyone reported feeling better and noted improved concentration, and most interesting, previously depressed people reported five times greater improvement than non-depressed people. The scientific evidence is very clear that exercise indeed improves depression and anxiety (Strohle, 2009); however, getting out and exercising outdoors has even better rewards. For example, Gilbert (2009) reported that both people who run on treadmills in the gym and people who run in nature show a reduction in depression; however, this is significantly greater for people who run in nature.

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Richard Louv, who coined the term **Nature Deficit Disorder**, wrote that humans are hard-wired for a genuine nature connection. Louv believes that the exponential increase in emotional and psychological problems in kids today are all related to an erosion of their connection with nature and immersion into the digital world (Louv, 2005). We need to ensure that we are unplugging and going outside to bond with nature, play, and reap the benefits of exercise. Doing this in a social context is even better.

Research, as summarized by Bathina et al. (2015), reveals that exercise increased brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which acts on health in the following ways:

1. Promotes growth and differentiation of neurons and synapses
2. Serves as a neuroprotective factor, helping to support the survival of existing neurons and encouraging the growth of new neurons and synapses.
3. Influences mechanisms of memory and cognition, contributing to the processes of learning and memory.
4. Influences neurotransmission, including glutamatergic and GABAergic synapses, which can impact serotonergic and dopaminergic neurotransmission.

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Cause Seven – Disconnection from a Hopeful and Secure Future:



☀️ Hopeful and Secure Future 📁 🌱

Hari (2018) notes that as Native Americans were stripped of their identities, they lost their connection to the future, became increasingly depressed, and then often resorted to alcohol abuse, which resulted in addiction. I would conjecture that as we lose connection with our true identities, not only within our families, but within our culture, we will further retreat to media in hopes of cultivating an identity. Sadly, the cyber-world cannot fill this need and only perpetuates a sense of disconnection, loneliness, and feelings of despair about a probable insecure future. We need to ensure that we have hope for what lies ahead, and that life has purpose and meaning. This can only happen when living a connected life.

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Cause Eight – Disconnection from Faith (emphasis mine):



“Man is not destroyed by suffering; he is destroyed by suffering without meaning.”

-Victor Frankl

Although not specifically mentioned by Hari (2018), I believe that faith can be fundamentally important. Observational studies suggest that people who have regular spiritual practices tend to live longer (Strawbridge et al., 1997). Another research study investigated 1,700 older adults and found that those who attended church were half as likely to have elevated levels of interleukin-6 (IL-6), associated with an increased incidence of disease. These authors concluded that religious commitment might improve stress control by affording better coping mechanisms, richer social support, and the strength of personal values and worldview (Koenig et al., 1997). Spirituality is essential to the “existential domain,” as measured in quality-of-life scores. Positive reports on those measures, i.e., a meaningful

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personal existence, fulfillment of life goals, and a feeling that life to that point had been worthwhile, correlate with a good quality of life for patients with advanced disease (Cohen et al., 1995).

It has been my observation in almost 35 years of practice that individuals who have some type of meaningful faith tend to be more resilient as well as more able to see the big picture when facing struggles or crises. The reader is encouraged to read Dr. Andy Doan's brave and candid book, *Hooked on Games*, which details how faith saved him from a devastating media addiction that almost destroyed his medical career, his life, and his family.

Strategy Two – Make a U-Turn on the Superhighway



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Matt Fradd (2017) writes that there are essential elements to making a U-turn on what he calls the “superhighway” to viewing porn in any one instance. First, referencing Dr. Kevin Skinner’s (2005) excellent book, *Treating Pornography Addiction*, we must be mindful of the “**activation sequence**” or the events which he calls **mile-markers** that lead up to viewing porn that are detailed below:



1. **Mile-marker one – The trigger or stimulus**: These are the things that initiate the activation sequence, and if we can understand and appreciate these triggers, the fight against the temptation is much more likely to be won. Obvious triggers might include getting a Victoria’s Secret catalogue or listening to provocative music, and less obvious triggers might include being rejected or having a tough day at the office or at school. So, we must be aware of the sights, sounds, and/or events that fire us up to redline RPMs. To make that critical decision not to take the on-ramp to the superhighway, Fradd notes that we must turn on the thinking brain or prefrontal cortex or “wise mind” to take charge over the more primitive parts of the brain. He adds that one of the easiest ways to turn on the prefrontal cortex or wise mind is to say out loud or even yell and label what is happening, for example: **“Caution - This is a trigger!”**
2. **Mile-marker two – The emotional response**: After the trigger, it is essential that we become aware of the emotional response that always follows. This could be a sense of excitement, curiosity or anticipation. Emotions can be very powerful and persuasive, so heads up, they can hijack us faster than a speeding bullet as was said about Superman.

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3. **Mile-marker three – The first thought:** At almost lightning speed and seemingly simultaneously after the emotion comes, that first thought appears, which might be, “I wanna do some porn” or “nobody has to know.” We can use our thinking brain to speak the truth: **“I am stressed and frustrated and my typical go-to is to run to porn to make it go away.”**
4. **Mile-marker four – The chemical release:** As discussed earlier, dopamine is a very powerful force and drives seeking behaviors, in particular. We love the feel of it more than just about anything. Dopamine tells us, “Remember where you got your last fix the last hundred times, and this is where you must go to get that amazing feeling again!” Those chemicals begin to be released in anticipation of the feeding fest.
5. **Mile-marker five – The body language:** At this point, our body begins to change in that heart rate increases, palms become cold or sweaty, pupils dilate, there can be a certain tingling feeling in the groin, butterflies are felt in the stomach, and/or our muscles tense up. Once again, it is imperative that we activate the wise/thinking part of the brain to stop the progression: **“My body is ramping up, and I need to take evasive action to shut this down or suffer the consequences!”**
6. **Mile-marker six – The battle:** At this point, we are in a fierce battle of pros and cons that bounce through our minds at rapid fire pace. This is the brain’s backup safety mechanism to throw on the emergency brakes to keep us from taking the plunge into the abyss. Remember how the Orbital Frontal Cortex and the Anterior Cingulate function to control the more primitive drives and/or behaviors, and the more that we engage in pornography, the more we degrade this

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protective system. Hypofrontality sets in. Whatever process wins will determine the final step – behavior.

7. **Mile-marker seven – The behavior:** Sadly, if nothing was done during the progression in mile-markers one to seven, we will step by default to the gallows and consume porn.

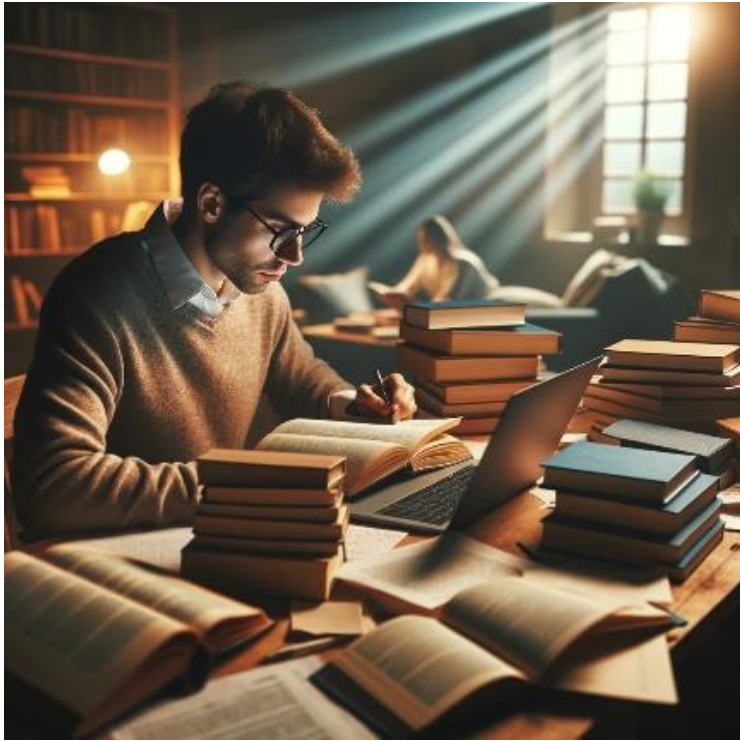
Fradd (2017) writes, and I agree, that the best way to escape from the superhighway to porn is to never take the onramp in the first place. As noted above, we need to activate our wise mind and say the plan out loud and maybe even yell it to ourselves whenever possible no matter where we might be in the above-detailed activation progression. This is powerful because the verbal cues wake us up to the reality of what is going on within and enable us to think about what we are doing in the moment. This strategy will be much more powerful if we do our homework and prepare for those moments rather than making the naïve assumption that we can always think on our feet in the heat of the moment.

Fradd (2017) writes that the following ideas that help prepare for the event have proven very helpful to help us deploy the thinking brain:

1. **Educate yourself:** We need to learn as much as we can about the impact of porn in our lives – how it damages our brains, our bodies, and our relationships. Much of this has already been covered in the previous pages of this paper, so, again, congratulations, you are on your way. The more we are acutely aware of this information as we fuse it into consciousness, the easier it will be to short-circuit the activation sequence.

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2. **Write down exit strategies:** Certainly, it is one thing to take a thought captive that puts us at risk for porn seeking, but it is altogether another to know what to do next. So, well before we get sucked into another activation sequence, we need to write down what we plan to do. Fradd (2017) recommends using strong action words such as: “Get up,” “Get out of here,” “Take a walk,” or “Go for a nice run.” Finally, we need not only to write them down but also to rehearse them by reading them out loud at least once a day,

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if not more. Like in the military, overlearning in garrison saves lives in battle. My son, who was a Marine, told me that he hated the training and thought that it was an unnecessary waste of time, but once he found himself in Fallujah, Iraq, in combat situations, it all made sense, and it helped to keep him alive.



3. **Contemplate the deeper meaning of sex:** This is not about thinking about sex in terms of our next time in bed or our next “conquest.” Rather, it mean taking the time to think philosophically about sex. That might mean we ponder questions such as the following:

- What is the nature of sex?
- What is the purpose of sex?
- Is sex just a means to “get off”, or does it have a more meaningful and possibly even a spiritual purpose?
- Is my sexuality just about “objectifying people,” just about my own pleasure?
- Is sex about fulfilling or blessing my partner? Is that equally or even more important than my own pleasure?
- Is the way I am having sex harming my partner?

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Strategy Three – Seek Online Help

As nicely summarized by Matt Fradd (2017), there are many excellent online resources. A cautionary note is that we must be careful about being online as this is the conduit for accessing porn. Research the options and find the one that best suits you and your unique needs. Some are faith-based and others not.

No Fap (nofap.com):

This site offers a secular and comprehensive community-based pornography recovery program, which helps porn struggling people connect with a very supportive community of co-strugglers who are determined to escape the bondage of compulsive sexual addictions. It is widely known in the US and internationally.

LifeStar (Lifestarnetwork.com):

As noted on their website, “The LifeStar Program and its Network of Therapists are dedicated to bringing hope, healing, and recovery to individuals, families, and spouses affected by unwanted compulsive sexual behaviors and the powerful grips of sex addiction. For over 20 years, LifeStar has been helping individuals, spouses, and families heal from the devastating effects of pornography addiction and other sexually compulsive behaviors. Through an innovative and proven three-phase treatment program, this intensive outpatient group therapy approach gives participants the resources, support, and structure needed to experience a successful recovery from the damaging effects of pornography and sexual addiction. LifeStar is an internationally recognized treatment program in nearly 40 cities across the U.S. and Canada. Developed by Dan Gray and Todd Olson, LifeStar is run by highly trained and licensed therapists who specialize in sexual addiction recovery. Each phase of recovery is

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specifically designed to gently uncover, yet aggressively heal, the destructive patterns that create and maintain addictive behaviors. Workbooks, along with other materials, help provide education and structure throughout the different phases of treatment.” I have researched this website and am impressed with the apparent comprehensiveness of services offered.

The Porn Effect (theporneffect.com):

This is a Catholic site for teens and younger adults, which tries to expose the reality behind what is the destructive fantasy of porn and provides a five-step plan to find freedom from it.

Integrity Restored (ingegrityrestored.com):

Their mission statement best summarizes this excellent Christian-based website: “Our mission at Integrity Restored is to help restore the integrity of individuals, spouses, and families that have been affected by pornography and pornography addiction. Integrity Restored provides education, training, encouragement, and resources to break free from pornography, heal relationships, and assist parents in preventing and responding to pornography exposure, which is so devastating in the lives of our children. We are also a resource that trains and helps clergy in assisting families at the parish level, so that the domestic church truly becomes what it is, the human space in which we encounter Christ.”

Beggars Daughter (Beggarsdaughter.com):

This website offers women, particularly Christian women, who are struggling with porn addiction very helpful resources and support.

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Addo Recovery (addorecovery.com):

This site offers online addiction therapy programs, as well as individual online and in-person therapy. It also specializes in betrayal trauma. It is nonsectarian and offers many personal testimonies of those who have struggled.

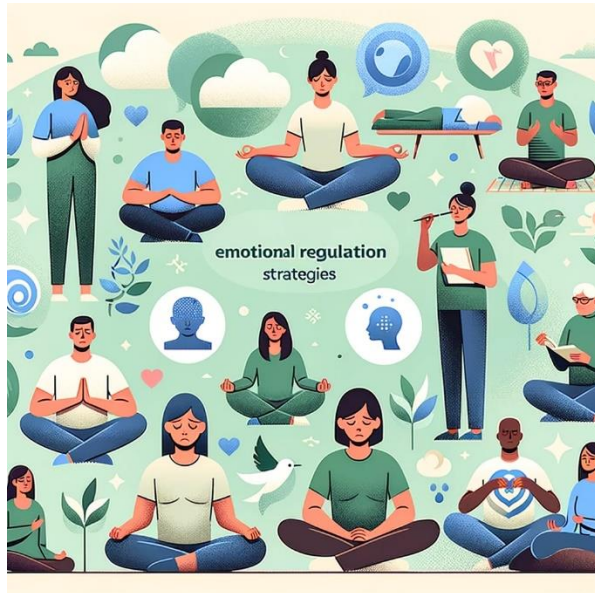
Real Battle Ministries (realbattle.org):

Cofounded by Andrew Doan, MD, PhD, Medical Doctor & Neuroscientist, and Julie Doan, RN. mother & family advocate, Real Battle Ministries is a first-class, science and spiritually-based supportive website with the following mission: “Educate: Inform families on the mental, physical and spiritual costs of digital media overuse, including developmental milestones for children, medical facts on brain health and addiction and suggestions for real life solutions. Encourage: Support families to be more informed on the critical issues of digital media overuse and addiction in their homes and encourage support to pursue alternative meaningful activities. To encourage your child to achieve his or her gifted potential. Support: Assist parents and children wishing to limit digital media by offering practical advice for managing digital media, promoting ongoing healthy childhood development, suggesting replacement activities and non-digital media hobbies, and networking with other like-minded families.” This site offers numerous links to scholarly articles and additional resources for treatment and support. It is the best supportive website I (Jeff) have reviewed.

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Strategy Four – Learn Healthy Self-Regulation Skills



Note: This set of skills is about paying attention to yourself (mindfulness) and not necessarily about religious practices.

As noted earlier, people who are addicted often live in a state of sympathetic arousal and often seek pornography to quell that state, one that makes them feel as though they are in “neurological hell” within their bodies. Although porn-seeking will bring some immediate relief, in the end, this backfires and only makes that internal activation worse as previously argued. Therefore, we need to learn healthy strategies to restore neurological peace. Although we may already know many of these strategies, we too often don’t exercise them on a regular basis.

Mindfulness is a type of meditation which allows us to focus on being intensely aware of what we are sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. Practicing mindfulness involves

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breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.

The Mayo Clinic offers a brief but very helpful set of mindfulness skills, which I find very helpful, and I encourage you to give them a try. They are briefly described below:

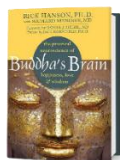
- **Pay attention**: It's hard to slow down and notice things in a busy world. Try to take the time to experience your environment with all your senses — touch, sound, sight, smell and taste. For example, when you eat a favorite food, take the time to smell, taste and truly enjoy it.
- **Live in the moment**: Try to intentionally bring open, accepting and discerning attention to everything you do. Find joy in simple pleasures.
- **Accept yourself**: Treat yourself the way you would treat a good friend.
- **Focus on your breathing**: When you have negative thoughts, try to sit down, take a deep breath and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Sitting and breathing for even just a minute can help. Slowing down our breathing and taking in our breath more deeply into our abdomen (called abdominal breathing) is most important. This helps to promote a balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide – the brain needs to have both in balance to promote healthy functioning and to restore us to bring on parasympathetic calm.

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- **Body scan meditation:** Lie on your back with your legs extended and arms at your sides, palms facing up. Focus your attention slowly and deliberately on each part of your body, in order, from toe to head or head to toe. Be aware of any sensations, emotions or thoughts associated with each part of your body.
- **Sitting meditation:** Sit comfortably with your back straight, feet flat on the floor and hands in your lap. Breathing through your nose, focus on your breath moving in and out of your body. If physical sensations or thoughts interrupt your meditation, note the experience and then return your focus to your breath.
- **Walking meditation:** Find a quiet place 10 to 20 feet long and begin walking slowly. Focus on the experience of walking, being aware of the sensations of standing and the subtle movements that keep your balance. When you reach the end of your path, turn and continue walking, maintaining awareness of your sensations (Mayo Clinic, accessed October 20, 2019).

For those interested in reading one of the best and most scientifically-based books on mindfulness and self-regulation, I would recommend Drs. Hanson and Mendius' excellent work, *Buddha's Brain*. Note that this book, although it has in its title a religious connotation, is not, in itself, a religious text.



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Strategy Five – Accountability

No man is an island, entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main.

- John Donne



As the above 17th-century quote from the famous English poet John Donne suggests, we are not in this alone, and so we would do well to recognize that our struggle to free ourselves from pornography cannot be won alone.

I strongly encourage you to find an **accountability partner** or group. I would not recommend that this individual be your love partner or spouse as this places the person you most care about in a very difficult if not untenable and/or unhealthy position. You might also seek online accountability sources, some of which are noted earlier or groups/individuals in your community or your place of worship.

Consider using accountability software. Among the best is: **Covenant Eyes (covenanteyes.com)**:

Matt Fradd (2017) writes, and we agree, that this is absolutely the best filtering and accountability software on the market today. With Covenant Eyes, you can use the filter component which filters out bad sites and/or the accountability component, which sends out a report to your designated accountability partner. You and/or your accountability partner will receive a weekly report about which sites

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were blocked, when the visit was attempted, and what search terms were used to get there.

Net Nanny (netnanny.com):

Net Nanny is a highly powerful platform for parents to control what their children are seeing and doing on the web. It doesn't just manage the time kids spend on the web. It also helps prevent cyberbullying, monitors cell phone activity, masks profanity, and blocks access to pornography. How intensely you choose to use it is up to you. Its suite of tools is accessible on most operating systems, either via web browser or mobile app. No matter where you are, you can stay connected and plugged-in to what your child is doing.

Accountable2You (accountable2you.com):

Accountable2You is Internet accountability software with an emphasis on real-time habit management. It can send out instant text alerts to your accountability partners. The software is easy to install on any number of devices. It's compatible with Apple, Windows, and Android operating systems. It can even run within Chrome and Linux. You can also assign specific partners to individual devices.

X3 Watch (x3watch.com):

X3 Watch is Internet accountability software with available tools for self-improvement. You can share a single activity tracker with your spouse or your whole family. This is designed to foster conversations about online responsibility. The company also offers online video workshops. These can help you navigate the software. They can also help you find your way through the challenges of addiction.

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If **in-home interventions** do not improve your situation, then a referral to a professional specifically experienced in media/pornography addiction is appropriate and, in more extreme cases, **residential treatment** specifically tailored to address media/pornography addiction should be considered. Among the best are:

reSTART cofounded Dr. Hilarie Cash, PhD, Chief Clinical Director and Cosette Rae, CEO, Chief Executive Officer, MSW, LICSW, ACSW, CDWF:

ReSTART specializes in behavioral addictions, Internet gaming disorder, video game addiction treatment, gambling, virtual reality, augmented reality, and excessive screentime and social media use. Care plans involve an in-depth examination into the factors leading to problematic screen use. In addition to adult treatment, reSTART offers **in-depth residential intervention for youth 13-18** experiencing video game addiction, Internet gaming disorder, social media addiction, excessive screentime use, and often associated problems, including academic difficulties, depression, anxiety, ADD/ADHD, learning differences, and family conflict. I have personally toured their treatment center and found the staff to be among some of most compassionate, dedicated, and well-trained professionals serving residential clients I have ever met. Their facilities are innovative and state-of-the-art. Contact Johnny Tock, MA, LMHC, Chief Admissions & Business Development Director at: Phone: 800.682.6934, email: johnny.tock@restartlife.com,

Website: <https://www.netaddictionrecovery.com/about-restart-tech-treatment/>. This is the first and best residential treatment facility for media addictions in the country.

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Launch House founded by Dr. Kardaras:

At Omega Recovery’s treatment program, clients receive 30 hours of clinical treatment while living in a large, beautiful, secure home right in the community! They spend five days a week working with some of the best therapists in Austin, attend life skills groups, receive peer recovery coaching, and personal fitness training all in a secure setting.

In addition, **residential “digital detox” services** are available for those who are overworked, overstressed, or have developed an over-dependence on screens and technology.

Phone: (512) 601-5407

Website: <https://omegarecovery.org/inpatient-rehab-in-austin-tx-omega-recovery/>

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PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION



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Effective psychotherapy for pornography addiction may be necessary if other approaches fail. A prospective therapist must have a solid grounding in the neuroscience of addiction, in general, and training/clinical experience in pornography and/or behavioral addictions, in particular.

Therapy can be either **bottom-up** or **top-down**. Bottom-up entails working with the body more directly. It is important to appreciate that, as previously noted, 80% of the fibers in the vagus nerve are sensory in that they go from the organs to the brain, and 20% are motor in that they travel from the brain to various body organs (Porges, 2017). This suggests that what our bodies tell us is indeed very important, and we must make every effort to listen and heal on that level. Top-down strategies that involve our thinking and, hopefully, a more rational brain requires a certain level of cognitive development and maturity, so very young children and less cognitively-developed adults may not be able to benefit from this approach very much.

Among the best bottom-up strategies is **Polyvagal-Informed Therapy**, initially founded by Dr. Steven Porges and developed into effective somatic-based therapies by therapists such as Debora Dana (2018, 2020), Dr. Mona Delahooke (2019), and Hansen, (2021).

Dana (2018) and Hansen (2021) note that it is a **ventral vagal state** and a perception of **safety** that bring the possibility for connection, curiosity, change, and healing. Dana (2018, 2020) presents the polyvagal approach, which she calls the four R's (the first three are bottom-up and the last is bottom-down (Dana, 2018):

The Four R's

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- **R**ecognize the autonomic state
- **R**espect the adaptive survival response
- **R**egulate or co-regulate in a ventral vagal state
- **R**e-story

Among the best top-down therapies is **Internal Family Systems (IFS) Therapy**. When applied to addiction, Internal Family Systems (IFS) is a therapeutic approach that identifies and addresses multiple sub-personalities or parts within each person's mental system. These parts are categorized into three types: **managers, firefighters, and exiles**, along with the concept of the Self. Understanding these roles can be particularly helpful in treating addiction.



1. **Managers:** These parts are responsible for maintaining a sense of order and control in a person's life. They anticipate and address problems proactively to protect the individual from harm or pain. In the context of addiction, managers might try to keep addictive behaviors in check or rationalize them to maintain a semblance of control.

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2. **Firefighters:** These parts are more reactive than managers. They emerge when an individual's exiled emotions or experiences become too overwhelming. Their role is to extinguish or numb these distressing feelings, often through impulsive behaviors like substance abuse or other addictive actions. Firefighters serve as a short-term solution to emotional pain but often exacerbate problems in the long run.
3. **Exiles:** These are vulnerable, often wounded parts that carry painful memories or emotions, such as trauma, fear, or shame. In addiction treatment, these might be parts that are deeply hurt or neglected, driving the addictive behavior as a form of escape or coping mechanism. Exiles are often kept out of conscious awareness by the actions of managers and firefighters.
4. **Self:** The Self is seen as the core or center of an individual's being, characterized by qualities like compassion, confidence, calmness, and clarity. The Self is not another part but rather the person's true, balanced essence. In IFS therapy, strengthening the Self is crucial, so it can lead and bring harmony among the parts. In addiction treatment, this means helping the individual to access their Self to understand and heal the exiles, manage the managers, and redirect the firefighters in healthier ways.

In IFS therapy for addiction, the goal is to understand the roles of these parts, how they contribute to the addictive behavior, and how to bring them into a harmonious balance under the leadership of the Self. This approach helps individuals address the root causes of their

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addiction and foster a more integrated, healthier state of being (facilitated by ChatGPT).

The infographic is set against a dark blue background with colorful abstract shapes in shades of pink, light blue, and orange. It is divided into three vertical columns, each with a title in light blue capital letters: 'EXILES', 'MANAGERS', and 'FIREFIGHTERS'. Each column contains a list of bullet points, also in light blue, describing the characteristics and behaviors of each group.

| EXILES | MANAGERS | FIREFIGHTERS |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Parts that have experienced trauma and become isolated or suppressed in an effort to protect the individual from feeling the pain, terror, fear, and so on.➤ Exiles are often young parts holding extreme feelings or beliefs that become isolated from the rest of the system ("I'm worthless," "I must be successful to be lovable," "I am a failure.")➤ Exiles become increasingly extreme and desperate as they look for opportunities to emerge and tell their stories.➤ Want to be cared for and loved and constantly seek someone to rescue and redeem them.➤ Can leave the individual feeling fragile and vulnerable. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Managers are proactive and try to avoid interactions or situations that might activate an exile's attempts to break out or leak feelings, sensations, or memories into consciousness.➤ The primary function of all managers is to keep the exiles exiled.➤ Common managerial behaviors: controlling, perfectionism, high criticism, co-dependency, narcissism, people pleasing, avoiding risks, being pessimistic, constantly striving to achieve, anxiety.➤ Managers will strive to prevent the exile from being triggered.➤ Common symptoms: Emotional detachment, panic attacks, somatic complaints, depressive episodes, hypervigilance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Have the same goal as managers: keep exiles under control and handle the pain. BUT firefighters have different strategies.➤ Managers want you to look good and be approved of, but firefighters only care about distracting from the pain, so they are often in conflict.➤ Firefighters are highly reactive and automatically activate when an exiled part is triggered (rejection, isolation, failure, traumatic memories, criticism).➤ The function of a firefighter is to eliminate painful feelings, thoughts, sensations, and memories without regard for the consequences.➤ Common symptoms: drug/alcohol use, self-mutilation, binge-eating, compulsive sexuality, media addictions |

Courtesy of my rockstar student, Alayna Collins, M.A., Doctoral Candidate

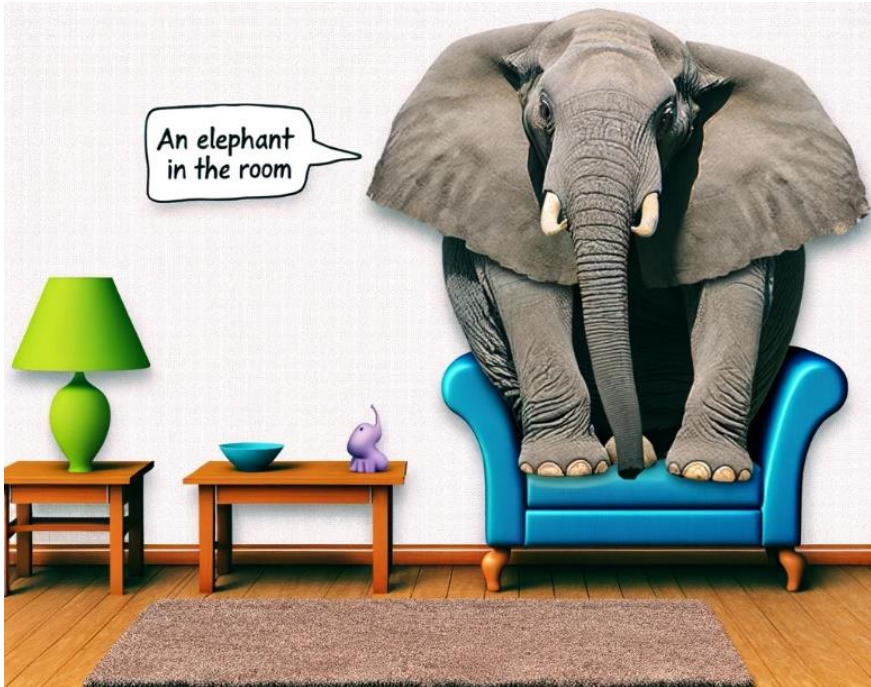
IN CLOSING



realize that when you are a **hammer**, **everything can seem like a nail**. But as a clinical psychologist, I have watched the evolution of Internet pornography facilitate the devolution of the mind, body, and soul of many of us, and I cannot fail to talk about what might be uncomfortable for me and for you. The **nail in the coffin** for far too many of our men, sons, fathers, and, ever increasingly, women, daughters, and mothers is pornography.

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It is the elephant in the room and its invasion must not be ignored. I urge you to save your own mind, body, and soul or, if you are not afflicted with this plague, please reach out and help to save the mind, body, and soul of another. Together and connected, we can do this!

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