



Chapter One

Deactivating the Reaction Sequence

Part One

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But fornication, (pornyouo- Strong's G4203- indulging in unlawful lust participating in idolatry) and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints:

Ephesians 5:3

What is pornography?

Pornography is any writing, pictures, or video that depict erotic behavior that intend to cause sexual excitement.

Why is pornography offensive to God? In Romans 1: 18-23, the Apostle Paul explained how ungodliness and unrighteousness bore fruit in the lives of people. He gave a very thorough description of how people fell away from God through the progression of sin. Romans 1:23 is instructive because he said, "[They], exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man..." Romans 1: 24 stated, "Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts' impurity to the dishonor of their bodies among themselves."

When one practices using pornography and is married achieving a strong connection with your spouse is unlikely due to the selfishness associated with self eroticism. One's physical sexual drive is fulfilled and the spouse is defrauded.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 7, Paul taught:

1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: *It is* good for a man not to touch a woman.

2 Nevertheless, *to avoid* fornication,(from porneuō unlawful sexual practices) let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

3 Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.

4 The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.

5 Defraud (Strong's G650 - apostereō - to deprive, to make destitute, kept back by fraud) ye not one the other, except *it be* with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency (Strong's G192 (Mounce) akrasia - intemperance, self-indulgence, unruly appetite, lustfulness).

The Reaction Sequence

The World Health Organization (WHO) has revised its diagnostic manual, the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), to include Compulsive Sexual Behavior Disorder, with a definition that encompasses both sex, pornography addiction and compulsivity.

The WHO states: "Compulsive sexual behavior disorder is characterized by a persistent pattern of failure to control intense, repetitive sexual impulses or urges resulting in repetitive sexual behavior. Symptoms may include repetitive sexual activities becoming a central focus of the person's life to the point of neglecting health and personal care or other interests, activities and responsibilities; numerous unsuccessful efforts to significantly reduce repetitive sexual behavior; and continued repetitive sexual behavior despite adverse consequences or deriving little or no satisfaction from it. The pattern of failure to control intense, sexual impulses or urges and resulting repetitive sexual behavior is manifested

over an extended period of time (e.g., 6 months or more), and causes marked distress or significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. Distress that is entirely related to moral judgments and disapproval about sexual impulses, urges, or behaviors is not sufficient to meet this requirement".¹

The belief of lost control often accompanies one who struggles with pornography. Pornography perverts (change from its original course, meaning, or state to a distortion or corruption) the original intent of the sexual relationship between husband and wife. The distortion often seen in pornography violates truth. It is ironic that some use pornography due to loneliness and difficulty building a healthy godly bond because pornography isolates them further from the trust, commitments, and respect which are needed to build relationships. The more one uses pornography to feel better the more detached they become from real people, real issues, and real life around them. Lust isolates. Love unites²

Behaviorist B.F. Skinner introduced the theory of operant conditioning. Skinner explained that people behave with the idea of a reward. Thus, people do things to make themselves feel better and when there is a reward, they are more likely to do the same thing again which reinforces the behavior.

The viewing of pornography is prompted by a reaction sequence which occurs between a stimulus (e.g., pornographic images, or sexual thoughts) and ends with a specific pleasant response (e.g., sexual excitement and often masturbation).

When this is repeatedly practiced there is increased sensitivity, i.e., everything/everyone starts being about sex, and there is increased tolerance meaning one needs more in quantity and possibly riskier behavior to achieve the sexual high.

When one habitually looks at pornography the brain changes. The hypothalamus (partly responsible for attachment behaviors and instinctive behaviors) and the amygdala (responsible for processing emotion) are directly affected by behaviors.³ The key part of this argument is that as a consequence of experience, the brain changes.

Some of these specific chemicals are related to sexual activity. These include epinephrine, testosterone, endorphins, oxytocin (a bonding peptide strongly associated with the feeling of love), serotonin, and dopamine. Dopamine has often been referred to as the “reward transmitter” because it is a dominant chemical released when we have accomplished something or have engaged in something with an excitatory outcome. These chemicals have an immediate effect on the mind and body. Their action parallels that of amphetamines, which are responsible for creating an immediate high-arousal state, but one that is short lived. In order to get to the same high-arousal state, an individual will often begin repeating the cycle over and over again which eventually alters the chemical structure of the brain. Sometimes simply fantasizing about the images or about the actual sexual act can produce a high-arousal state.⁴

The same “Feel good” chemicals that are related to sexual activity are released while viewing pornography. In Galatians chapter 5, one of the works of the flesh that cause men not to inherit the kingdom of God is witchcraft. Strong’s G5331 pharmakeiah a drug (intoxicant). Thayer’s explains that it is poison and the deception and seduction to idolatry a spell giving potion. Pornography use releases same chemicals as certain drugs.

According to Dr. Kevin Skinner, here are some criteria to evaluate one’s level of addiction:

- Recurrent failure to resist impulses to sexually acting out.
- More extensive time spent in those sexual practices.
- Ongoing, but unsuccessful, efforts to stop, reduce, or control sexual behavior.
- Feeling preoccupied with fantasy, sexualized thoughts, and/or preparatory activities.
- Continuation of ungodly behavior despite its consequences.
- Tolerance – more frequent or intense stimuli are needed over time to obtain the desired result.
- Deliberately limiting social, occupational, or recreational activities in order to keep time open for unchaste sexual practices.
- Distress, restlessness, or irritability if unable to act on unchaste sexual impulses, accompanied by dizziness, body aches, headaches, sleeplessness, restlessness, anxiety, mood swings, and/or depression.⁵

Please do not minimize the serious consequences associated with using pornography. Please do not try to justify the use of pornography.

Understanding the Reaction Sequence

If this corrupted pathway can be avoided, a new pathway can be formed. We can establish a healthy sexual pattern where the flow is redirected toward holiness rather than corrupted intimacy. By intentionally redirecting the neuro-chemical flow, the path toward right thinking becomes the default path and is established as the mental habit.

A reaction sequence is a pathway formed in the mind that generally begins with a stimulus (something that urges to action) and ends with a specific response. Once developed, a reaction sequence will automatically change a person's emotional state.

Here is the entire reaction sequence:

Stimulus (trigger)—boredom, sadness, memories, movies etc. Once the stimulus is triggered in the mind the next thing that happens is that our mind gives meaning to the stimulus. The first thing a person will do is have an emotional response.

Emotion—Instant excitement, interest, or curiosity are common emotions. Almost simultaneous to the emotions being felt is a thought in the mind.

Thought—Initially the thought may be, “I wonder” or, “What will I see or find?” Once this initial interest and curiosity settles in, the thought is likely to be something like, “I could use a little” or, “I like what I am feeling—why not?” When the emotion and thought are entertained, the mind quickly begins to release chemicals into the body in anticipation of what is going to happen next.

Chemical Release—The body is flooded with chemicals preparing the body for what it will experience and what could happen. It is important to note that once a reaction sequence is fully developed in the mind, these chemicals are released into the body before a person ever uses. With the release of these chemicals into the body, the body begins to change.

Body Language—A person’s heart rate will increase; The hands may become sweaty or cold. The eyes will likely become dilated. The muscles become tight or rigid. With the body feeling strong emotions, the mind still has to decide if it is going to give in or not. This is when the more rational part of the mind steps in and says, “Are you sure you want to do this?” It is the mind’s back-up system that allows it to respond rather than react every time.

Reasoning— The battle inside goes something like this: I really shouldn’t view this sexual activity. What will my family think? What if I get caught? I could lose my job/freedom. While these thoughts are going on, the mind is also thinking: I have been doing this for years, what’s one more time going to matter? I deserve this. It’s not that big of a deal. Nobody will find out. Unfortunately, most individuals wait too long before this battle begins and the mind has already released the chemicals into the body, thus making the battle a very hard one to fight. Ultimately the winning thoughts of this battle determine the outcome.

The battle comes to an end when the mind **authorizes** a specific behavior. The authorizing agent is generally a hypothesis or a belief (a hypothesis is a thought that is not cemented into the mind, whereas a belief is something that you truly believe). **Hypothesis/ Belief**—I wonder if this will ever go away (hypothesis). Common beliefs include: I cannot get over this problem so why try? I deserve this. It’s not that bad. One more time won’t hurt. Often before the person uses, they must first accept the behavior as something that is okay. Therefore, the authorization from the beliefs is a very important part of this process.

Response—The most common response at this point is giving in, which will likely end in feeling good briefly. Once a reaction sequence has been established in the mind it can take a matter of seconds to go through the whole process described above. That is why so many people claim they feel they have no control over their compulsive behavior. Unfortunately, too much stimuli can lead to multiple reaction sequences in people, and that, if left undealt with, creates a high probability for relapse.

What is exciting is that reaction sequences can be changed or deactivated. Deactivating a reaction sequence requires an individual to first understand his

own reaction sequence. Then, the next time it happens the individual must realize it is happening as quickly as possible—early awareness is critical.

Finally, he must create a new response when the reaction sequence begins. A reaction sequence that is never evaluated or understood will lead to the same behaviors over and over again. The moment people gain awareness into their own reaction sequences they are more likely to understand themselves.

Instead of you being held captive by pornography or any sinful practice you can take that thought captive.

2 Corinthians 10:4 (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty (dunatos possible, able and influential) through God to the pulling down (destruction) of strong holds; (ochuroma a bulwark of error or vice)

2 Corinthians 10:5 Casting down imaginations, (logismos thoughts decisions reasoning) and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought (noēma understanding, intellect, heart, soul, affections, feelings, disposition, device) to the obedience of Christ;

1- <https://psychcentral.com/blog/sex/2020/06/what-is-porn-addiction-compulsivity#1>

2- <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=7438>

3 - Norman, Doidge. The Brain that Changes Itself: (Viking, 2007 p. 97),

4 - Kevin Skinner, Treating Pornography Addiction: The Essential Tools for Recovery, Provo, Utah: Growth Climate Inc., (2005), p.46

5 – Ibid. p. 22-23.

6 – To Kill a Lion by Bruce Lengeman <https://a.co/42utLUm>