STUDY GUIDE ON
Pornography

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The Salvation Army believes that all persons are created in God’s image and affirms the sanctity of the human body and relationships, based on the teaching of Scripture. Pornography is seen as a violation of these. Therefore, its production, distribution and use should be discouraged.

The Salvation Army abhors the prevalence of and easy accessibility to all forms of pornography, and will make every reasonable effort to stop its production, distribution and use.

The Salvation Army particularly deplores child pornography of any type and strongly opposes the creation, distribution and use of images of children for sexual purposes.
The Greek root for pornography is porne – meaning ‘female captives’. The original word includes the use of sex for subjugation, aggression, degradation, abuse and violence. Today the word is more broadly used to reference sexually explicit images and literature.

The tension between the first amendment rights of free speech and pornography is well known. Factoring ‘artistic’ interpretation and censorship into the dialogue adds additional complexity. The exception to this is child pornography, which is broadly condemned.

In 1964, US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart presiding over a censorship case said he neither would not nor could not intelligibly define obscene pornography, famously adding, ‘but I know it when I see it.’

The presence and influence of the internet now means that once clandestine sexual images are now quite remarkably abundant and accessible. This is due to a ‘triple-A effect’ – accessibility, affordability and anonymity.

Suffice it to say, pornography is now an almost inescapable presence in mainline culture, moving from peripheral parts of town into regular family living rooms and innumerable handheld devices.

The net impact is far reaching and still being processed by society in general and the Church in particular. Indeed, Christians accessing pornography is well-attested.

Philip Yancey writes: ‘The Pope utters pronouncements, Denominations issue position papers, and many Christians ignore them and follow the lead of the rest of society.’ (Holy Sex)

The church has been historically reticent to discuss human sexuality and appetite while at the same time seemed harsh and unforgiving when addressing lust. In contrast, Jesus responds to those who have fallen into sexual sin with evident compassion and forgiveness.

While sexual lust has always been part of our broken humanity, what impact is pornography having in our nation and upon our communities of faith? What do the statistics and trends show us?
At the peak of Playboy’s popularity in 1975, the magazine had a circulation of 5.6 million. Today more than 100 million in the USA visit adult sites monthly.

46% & 16% OF MEN & OF WOMEN ages 18-35 intentionally view pornography in any given week.

While accurate figures are notoriously difficult to record, the 2006 sex-entertainment business estimated $13 billion revenues in the US. The Free Speech Coalition notes revenues are now declining – due to the amount of free material available online.

A 2002 survey conducted for PBS by Indiana University stated that 86% of respondents said porn can educate people, and 72% said it provides a harmless outlet for fantasies.

The Kinsey Institute records that 80% of pornography viewers ‘felt fine’ about it, while 9% have tried unsuccessfully to stop.

Sex addiction refers to a range of sexually-related, compulsive behaviours that significantly interfere with normal living and cause severe negative impacts on relationships, including with family, friends, and loved ones. (Chris McKenna – Covenant Eyes)

It is generally accepted that accessing pornography is a response to intimacy deficit. When our deep human need to connect with another human being, to be intimately known and accepted, is damaged or absent, we can substitute and self-medicate.

11-13 is the average age of first pornography viewing by boys. Sometimes this is unintentional as children research homework on the internet.

There is increasing evidence that pornography is destructive at a community level. The pornography industry is linked to organised crime, sex trafficking, violence against women, child abuse, marital stress and increasingly classified as a major form of addiction.

In 2016 the State of Utah passed a resolution to treat pornography as a public-health crisis.

Decades ago, social commentator Malcolm Muggeridge sharply noted: ‘If you separate sex from procreation and love, very rapidly you turn it into a horror, erotomania which falls like black atomic rain on the just and unjust alike, drenching us, blinding us, stupefying us.’

The Salvation Army has long been associated with a compassionate presence in the red-light districts of London, New York and Amsterdam. Major Alida Bosshardt, a Dutch Officer served for over 50 years in such a capacity and was voted as ‘Amsterdam’s Greatest Citizen.’ Salvationists have also recently attended Adult Entertainment conventions in California, drawing attention to the scourge of sex trafficking.
While nothing resembling contemporary pornography is present in the story of the scriptures, wholesome sexuality, sexual temptations, brokenness and sin are consistently and forthrightly addressed. The candour and honesty is remarkable. This is in narrative form, wisdom literature, poetry, teaching and practical exhortations. The principles and lessons can be readily applied to our day and context.

Scripture portrays our human sexuality with a profoundly spiritual dimension, anything but merely physical.

**Human Chemistry**

Since the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib, rapidly followed by Adam’s first sight of Eve and his exclamation of wonderment and delight ‘flesh of my flesh,’ men and women have exhibited sexual attraction. We could say this is naturally magnetic – 2 genders drawn to becoming ‘one flesh’ again.

For men this attraction is especially visual, and can be swiftly captivating. We see this in the story of King David who espies Bathsheba bathing (2 SAM 11). He becomes consumed by sexual desire.

Philip Yancey describes the relatively innocent scenario, surely enacted countless times in innumerable ways over the centuries, where ‘a teenage boy might get a glimpse of a girl’s bare legs as she stomped on grapes or bent over to draw water from a well.’

Thus, from time immemorial the contour of the female form can generate a natural, instant attraction in a man. Physiologically, here is a delivery system that powerfully affects the brain and nervous system.

This is the fuel of attraction – it is not inherently sinful. Proverbs encourages: ‘may you rejoice in the wife of your youth … may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.’ (PROV 5)

Russell Willingham insightfully writes: ‘Simply noticing an attractive woman and responding emotionally is not lust. It’s that second look, taken with the intention of mental pursuit, that is adulterous.’ (Breaking Free)

It is no happenstance that the short love poem Song of Songs repeats three times: ‘Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.’ (SONG 2,3, 8)

As males and females progress from childhood through adolescence and into young adulthood they will physically experience the reality that ‘sex has enormous power.’

As with any power it needs to be handled very carefully – ‘if perverted, sex is a power that destroys.’ (Eisenman – Temptations Men Face)

Where do we need to exercise care, caution and wisdom to avoid that which can wreak destruction?
'Wanderings from God often begin by looking on forbidden objects,' writes G.D. Watson, ‘such was the case of Eve, who stood looking on the forbidden fruit, when God told her not even to look upon it.’

Looking led to handling, leading to consumption, leading to shame, leading to alienation from God – a pattern many who gaze at pornography will recognise.

‘Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes’ seems wise counsel from Proverbs 6.

A principle emerges: ‘Through the eyes our thoughts can take hold, kindling desire.’

Jesus addresses this with divine depth and insight in the Sermon on the Mount when he goes beyond the physical act of adultery to the inner recesses of the mind and heart. ‘I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’ (MT 5)

His ensuing Aramaic rhetoric linking eye and hand ‘causing you to sin’ may also subliminally address the compulsive self-stimulation associated with sexual imagination (MT 5).

This is the primal lure of pornography – the creation of lust, ‘elevating the animal in us above the human.’

Pornographic enticement can be engaged by a combination of naiveté, curiosity and sin. However, once engaged pornography invariably reveals its emptiness. The images are not real – they might temporarily feed a fantasy, but they cannot feed our soul. ‘If we indulge ourselves we will only be hungrier than before.’ (Eisenman)

This is the classic journey of compulsive behaviour. People who indulge in pornography will only experience short term satisfaction, at most. Each encounter may carry a promise of ecstasy, but it never does.

Frederick Buechner writes: ‘Lust is the craving for salt of a person who is dying of thirst.’

It is to that painful scenario that we now turn.
Harmful Captivity

Just as not everyone who smokes or drinks alcohol becomes addicted, not everyone who accesses pornography will become addicted. But the potential is real and is clearly increasing as a social presence.

Addiction is any compulsive, habitual behaviour that limits the freedom of human desire. We attach our desires to specific objects and become consumed by the habitual behaviour. We want to break away from the object of our craving, but we cannot.

Paul has insight into such addiction and realises its power: ‘What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do … the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing.’ (ROM 7)

In 2004 the US Senate heard the following testimony: ‘Modern science allows us to understand that the underlying nature of an addiction to pornography is chemically nearly identical to a heroin addiction. […] The brain releases opioids—chemicals that are the naturally occurring analogues to synthetic opiates such as morphine or heroin. It is to ever-higher levels of these opioids that the pornography addict has become addicted’ (Jeffrey Satinover, 2004).

There is a cruel, even demonic dimension to this that people entrapped by sexual addiction recognise and experience all too painfully. In the phraseology of the recovery community, their enemy is ‘cunning, baffling and powerful.’

The sex addiction cycle is described by Don Crossland as follows:

**Secretise** – creating a fantasy world apart from reality.
**Fantasise** – dependency on the emotional and physical high.
**Ritualise** – forming rituals involving pornography.
**Realise** – the fantasy and rituals are acted out.
**Paralyse** – vowing not to succumb again and failing.
**Demoralise** – repeated failure, shame and depression.
**Desensitise** – seared conscience, change of world-view to fit behaviour.

Ephesians tersely states: ‘Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.’ (EPH 4)

As pornographic entrapment continues the voyeurs are lured away from true human relationship, only pursuing a mirage, pixels on a screen. Men are especially susceptible to such depersonalised sexuality.

**Like all other addicts, the pornographer will lie to cover it up, heedless of risk or cost to themselves or to others.**

This seems dire, and it truly can be. However, there is a way forward, a rich biblical truth: ‘Those who conceal their sins do not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.’ (PROV 28)
Healthy Conscience

The good news is that there are people once entrapped by pornography who by God’s grace overcome compulsive behaviour. One feature is referenced in Proverbs above – confession and honesty.

Like any secret sin, admission can strike terror in the mind of a person.

The axiom is true and applicable here: Confess to God and we are forgiven; confess to a person and we are healed.

The relationships present in a trusted community of faith are invaluable here, in addition to counselling and an accountability group.

Interestingly, Gordon McDonald lists male friendships as a worthy and strategic antidote for men looking to ward off sexual temptation. ‘If the need for connection is exclusively centred on the female gender, be ready for an onslaught of struggles with fantasy and lust … share life with other men as you work with them, fight the battles of life with them and discover the world with them.’

A principled action is to avoid pornographic enticements altogether. Job is classic in this regard: ‘I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.’ (31)

Such decisions need to be made in the clear light of day, beforehand. Paul captures the freedom and the necessary resolve perfectly: ‘Everything is permissible for me—but I will not be mastered by anything.’ (1COR 12)

Philip Yancey describes the sexual taboos of the Bible ‘not as capricious rules to spoil our sexual adventures but rather as guidelines protecting something of great value that can only be realised in an exclusive, covenant relationship.’ (Holy Sex)

Another strategy to nurture a healthy, wholesome conscience is to deliberately avoid the known areas of temptation. No truth is better expressed: ‘Be careful that you don’t fall. No temptation has seized you except what is common to all.’ (1 COR 10)

Finally, we can exercise the Wesleyan principle of ‘expulsive love’ – the infilling of divine love that ipso facto expels all else. ‘Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.’ (PHL 4)

The biblical words for this are sanctification and renewing of the mind. (Russell Willingham – Breaking Free)
SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Some assert that pornography serves society by relieving and reducing sexual aggression. Research does not support this hypothesis and indicates the opposite, pornography increases sexual aggression. (Balswick, Authentic Human Sexuality)

US Senate testimony records: ‘Pornography, by its very nature, is an equal opportunity toxin. It damages the viewer, the performer, and the spouses and the children of the viewers and the performers.’ (Mary Anne Layden, 2004)

Children who have porn-viewing fathers complain that when he looks at them it feels ‘creepy.’ The parental gaze has now become the ‘porn gaze.’

Clinical data indicates that the spouses of porn viewers are often depressed, and are more likely to have eating disorders, body image disorders and low self-esteem.

Those who work in the pornography industry have high rates of substance abuse and depression. They often have to be drunk or high in order to go to work.

The brains of compulsive pornography users resemble the brains of alcoholics watching ads for a drink. (American Psychological Association)

‘Pornography’s effect on the brain mirrors addiction to heroin or crack cocaine.’ (Layden)

‘For the viewer, pornography increases the likelihood of sexual addiction and they respond in ways similar to other addicts. Sexual addicts develop tolerance and will need more and harder kinds of pornographic material.’ (Layden)

Advances in neuroscience confirm that emotionally arousing images imprint and alter the brain, triggering an instant, involuntary, but lasting, biochemical memory trail. Once our neurochemical pathways are established, they are difficult or impossible to delete. (Reisman, 2004 US Senate Testimony)

A Time magazine cover story (April 2016) features a growing movement amongst young men, users of pornography from a young age, creating material and community groups helping other men quit pornography use. They can attest to the array of damaging effects. This is not a faith-based initiative, maybe a sign that broader society is beginning to push back in this matter.
1. ‘Scripture portrays human sexuality with a profoundly spiritual dimension, anything but merely physical.’ What are the implications of such a statement?

2. Where are some of the ‘danger zones’ we need to exercise care and avoid that can lead to sexual temptation?

3. What are our experiences with the broad range of addictive behaviours? What can we learn and apply to pornography?

4. Honesty, close friendships, avoidance of danger areas and the infilling of love are all listed as helpful for a ‘healthy conscience’ regarding pornography. How feasible is this?

5. How can The Salvation Army most effectively serve as a witness or healing agent in a world of ‘eroto-mania?’ What suggestion do have for your Corps?

**Resources**

- Eros Redeemed, John White, IVP, 1993
- Every Man’s Battle, Stephen Arterburn, Waterbrook Press, 2000
- Every Woman’s Battle, Shannon Ethridge, Waterbrook Press, 2009
- Authentic Human Sexuality, Jack and Judy Balswick, IVP, 1999

Religious Alliance Against Pornography – [www.religiousalliance.org](http://www.religiousalliance.org)
Covenant Eyes accountability software – [www.covenanteyes.com](http://www.covenanteyes.com)
White Ribbon Against Pornography – [www.endsexualexploitation.org](http://www.endsexualexploitation.org)
Human Chemistry

**GEN 2:22**
Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. [23] The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh […]’

**GEN 3:6**
When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. [7] Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

**2 SAM 11:2**
One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, [3] and David sent someone to find out about her.

**PROV 5:18**
May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. [19] A loving doe, a graceful deer— may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.

**SONG 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4**
Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

Unholy Curiosity

**PROV 6:25**
Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes.

**MAT 5:27**
‘You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ [28] But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’

**MAT 5:29**
If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. [30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

**I COR 6:18**
Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. [19] Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; [20] you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your body.
COL 3:5
Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Harmful Captivity

PS 32:3
When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. [4] For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

ROM 1:22
Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. [24] Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. [25] They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.

GAL 6:8
The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

EPH 4:19
Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

2 TIM 2:22
Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

JAS 1:13
When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; [14] but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. [15] Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Healthy Conscience

JOB 31:1
I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.

PRO 28:13
Those who conceal their sins do not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

I COR 6:12
‘Everything is permissible for me’—but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me’—but I will not be mastered by anything.
I COR 10:12
If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! [13] No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

2 COR 10:5
We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

PHLP 4:8
Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.