

## MISSION IN THE MIDST OF A GLOBAL PORNOGRAPHY EPIDEMIC: A THREE-DIMENSIONAL GOSPEL FOR ADDICTS<sup>1</sup>

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### *Abstract*

This article discusses the problem of pornography from a missiological perspective, especially concerning the contexts of Guilt/Innocence, Shame/Honor, and Fear/Power. The scope of the global problem is explained as well as specific issues related to the problem in the United States and Nigeria. Possible solutions to the problem in specific contexts are presented.

### INTRODUCTION

In his 2013 book *Pressure Points: Twelve Global Issues Shaping the Face of the Church*, J.D. Payne included a chapter on what he called the “Pornification of Societies.” This chapter captured my attention because of what seemed to me like twin realities: On the one hand, I had seen the problem throughout the world, especially in Southeast Asia, where I

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<sup>1</sup> This article is largely based on a paper presented at a regional meeting of the Evangelical Missiological Society.

served from 2005–2010 as a student church planter and professor of youth ministry in a Malaysian seminary. On the other hand, I had never read a missiologist’s inclusion of this as a major problem in the cultures we aim to reach.

I was awakened to the true scope of the problem in 2009, two months after teaching a two-week course, “Discipleship in Youth Ministry,” in Penang, Malaysia. A youth minister from Jakarta emailed to thank me for what he learned in the course. Specifically, he let me know that he had found the power to defeat his pornography addiction. He proceeded from there to tell me how he had already shared the good news of his newfound freedom to both his youth workers and his youth group. Horrified at what was sure to be an unfolding scandal in the church, I immediately responded in order to help him through the fallout. Astoundingly, the only thing that surprised anyone was his self-control. While the extreme nature of this story is not necessarily normative throughout Malaysia or Indonesia, it serves to illustrate the fact that Christians around the world are struggling with pornography addiction.

Resources and ministries do, in fact, exist to help western Christians with pornography addiction (including missionaries), and many mission agencies have policies in place to screen future missionaries.<sup>2</sup> Little has been written, however, to help missionaries specifically engage their new cultures with the gospel and disciple Christians in culturally appropriate ways when it comes to pornography addiction. Therefore, after examining the global scope of the problem, this article will seek to frame the global pornography crisis through a missiological lens in order to begin asking the right questions regarding how we can assist missionaries and majority world church leaders.

## **THE GLOBAL SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM**

One of the major online pornography distributors, PornHub, allows users to upload homemade videos, increasing revenue by receiving free content and charging others to view it. While comprehensive and accurate

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<sup>2</sup> Focus on the Family, “Resource List: Overcoming Sexual Brokenness,” accessed September 25, 2019, [http://media.focusonthefamily.com/topicinfo/overcoming\\_sexual\\_brokenness.pdf](http://media.focusonthefamily.com/topicinfo/overcoming_sexual_brokenness.pdf).

statistics for individual countries are difficult to find (especially non-Western countries), their 2018 report makes two things very clear: 1. The amount of pornography being consumed on an annual basis is staggering. 2. It's a global issue. Below are a few of the highlights relevant to this paper.

- If you began watching all of the videos uploaded in 2018 just after the Wright brothers' first flight in 1903, you would still be watching them today.
- If you began watching all of the videos uploaded on PornHub to date (including everything before 2018 as well) when the first telegraph was sent in 1844, you would still be watching.
- Every minute on PornHub, 7708GB of data are transferred, 63,992 people visit the site, 207,405 videos are viewed, and 10,498 hours of pornography are consumed.
- The top four countries, measured by overall traffic, are the United States, the United Kingdom, India, and Japan.
- The top two countries, measured by time spent per visit, are the Philippines and South Africa.
- The most viewed category in Asia – from Southeast Asia, into China, and across Mongolia into Russia – is Hentai, a pornographic spinoff of anime and manga.<sup>3</sup>

While such comprehensive data is difficult to find elsewhere, there is no shortage of localized research to illustrate that porn use can be found in almost all corners of the globe, including countries we think of as holding “conservative values.” A 2017 article from *Fight the New Drug* cites statistics from a SimilarWeb analysis on global porn consumption, specifically discussing the overall percentages of adult entertainment websites compared to other categories such as travel, news media, arts and entertainment, and shopping.<sup>4</sup> While the overall average is 4.4%,

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3 Pornhub, “2018 Year in Review,” accessed January 24, 2019, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2018-year-in-review>.

4 I was unable to find the original source of the report. This was frequently the case concerning significant studies such as this. Even studies reported by Google, and cited from a multitude of sources, remained elusive. This is one of the reasons I decided to shift the focus of the paper from an overview of the global epidemic to a cultural approach.

the countries with the largest shares of porn websites are Iran, Egypt, Serbia, and Japan.<sup>5</sup> The same report showed the countries with the highest numbers of pages viewed per visit were Hong Kong, Norway, Netherlands, and Singapore.<sup>6</sup>

The harmful effects of pornography addiction on society are as numerous as they are profound. Below are just a few of the issues confirmed by various studies. Pornography addiction:

- Increases the risk of divorce.<sup>7</sup>
- Is a cause of erectile dysfunction.<sup>8</sup>
- Rewires the brain and creates the need for darker forms of porn.<sup>9</sup>
- Changes sexual preferences.<sup>10</sup>

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5 “Sex Stats: Some Middle Eastern Countries Have the Biggest Shares of Porn Sites,” accessed March 12, 2019, <https://fightthenewdrug.org/sex-stats-who-are-the-biggest-consumers-of-internet-porn/>.

6 Ibid.

7 *The Journal of Sex Research* found the following: “The probability of divorce roughly doubled for married Americans who began pornography use between survey waves... Additional analyses also showed that the association between beginning pornography use and the probability of divorce was particularly strong among younger Americans, those who were less religious, and those who reported greater initial marital happiness.” Perry, Samuel L. and Cyrus Schleifer. “Till Porn Do Us Part? A Longitudinal Examination of Pornography Use and Divorce,” *The Journal of Sex Research*, 55:3 (2018), 284-296, DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2017.1317709.

8 *Sexual Health Visual*, a multimedia scientific publication, asserts, “Research indicates that the escalation of erectile dysfunction in youthful men can be attributed to excessive internet pornography use. Usage through adolescence and early adulthood, when the brain is at its peak of neuroplasticity and Dopamine levels are at their highest, creates an environment of increased vulnerability to addiction.” Vikki Prior, “Implications of Escalating Erectile Dysfunction in Youthful Men Resulting from Internet Pornography Use,” accessed March 13, 2019, [https://www.sexualhealthvisual.com/Video\\_by\\_Vikki\\_Prior\\_on\\_Implications\\_of\\_Escalating\\_Erectile\\_Dysfunction\\_in\\_Youthful\\_Men\\_Resulting\\_from\\_Internet\\_Pornography\\_Use.html](https://www.sexualhealthvisual.com/Video_by_Vikki_Prior_on_Implications_of_Escalating_Erectile_Dysfunction_in_Youthful_Men_Resulting_from_Internet_Pornography_Use.html).

9 A 2017 article on Fight the New Drug’s website asserted, “Repeated consumption of porn causes the brain to literally rewire itself. It triggers the brain to pump out chemicals and form new nerve pathways, leading to profound and lasting changes in the brain.” “How Porn Changes the Brain,” accessed March 13, 2019, <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-changes-the-brain/>.

10 A study presented at the *Psychologists for Social Responsibility* annual meeting in 2011, differentiating between “sex buyers” and non-sex buyers,” found the following: Sex buyers masturbated to pornography more often than non-sex buyers, imitated pornography with partners more often, and had more often received their sex education from pornography than the non-sex buyers. Over time,

- Increases the demand for prostitution, which is met by sex trafficking.<sup>11</sup>

If pornography addiction among Christians in other countries is anything close to what exists in the American church, then there are massive implications for discipleship. For example, if we are teaching new believers how to read the Bible and apply it to their lives but we're not addressing the issue that has them in daily bondage to sin, their growth will be truncated. While we are equipping them for evangelism and executing our plans for multiplication of churches, they will be sitting in silent shame over their addiction, wondering how God could use someone in their spiritual condition. In the midst of the challenge, however, there is also an opportunity to make the gospel even more relevant to their lives.

## A MISSIOLOGICAL VIEW OF A GLOBAL CRISIS

Having briefly looked at the enormity of the problem, I will move forward with the desire to demonstrate what it looks like to address the issue missiologically. More specifically, I will peer through the lenses of Guilt/Innocence (GI), Shame/Honor (SH), and Fear/Power (FP) to examine the cultural issues involved with addressing the pornography epidemic. Each one of these lenses presents a different way in which a culture may understand right from wrong. Peering through each, we can also look to Scripture to see how the lenses help us to see a different dimension of the gospel that is addressed clearly in the grand narrative of Scripture. While

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as a result of their prostitution and pornography use, sex buyers reported that their sexual preferences changed. Melissa Farley, Emily Schuckman, Jacqueline M. Golding, Kristen Houser, Laura Jarrett, Peter Qualliotine, & Michele Decker, "Comparing Sex Buyers with Men Who Don't Buy Sex: 'You can have a good time with the servitude' vs. 'You're supporting a system of degradation,'" Report at Psychologists for Social Responsibility Annual Meeting, Boston, 2018. <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdfs/Farleyetal2011ComparingSexBuyers.pdf>).

11 Huffington Post cites sociologist Gail Dines from Wheelock College, who elaborates on the above. "We know that trafficking is increasing – which means demand is increasing. This means that men are increasingly willing to have sex with women who are being controlled and abused by pimps and traffickers. . . . The biggest sex educator of young men today is pornography, which is increasingly violent and dehumanizing, and it changes the way men view women." John-Henry Westen, "Want to Stop Sex Trafficking? America's Porn Addiction," accessed March 13, 2019, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/johnhenry-westen/want-to-stop-sex-traffick\\_b\\_6563338.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/johnhenry-westen/want-to-stop-sex-traffick_b_6563338.html).

this will be explained in greater detail later, a short introduction follows.

- Cultures that lean primarily toward Guilt/Innocence (GI) view right and wrong primarily based on an understanding of justice and the law. The gospel is most clearly understood, then, as salvation from guilt and the penalty of sin.
- Cultures that lean primarily toward Shame/Honor (SH) understand right and wrong based on what grants honor (both to themselves and their families and communities) and avoids shame. The gospel is most clearly understood, then, in terms of salvation from their shame and how God grants them an honorable position as a son or daughter of the Most High.
- Cultures that lean primarily toward Fear/Power (FP; mostly animistic cultures) see life as a struggle for spiritual power in order to attain what they need. What is right is simply determined by what the individual god or spirit demands from someone in order to gain favor. The gospel is most easily understood, then, as salvation from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of a sovereign and good God, who is more powerful than all other spirits.

In the end, each of these aspects of the gospel is true for everyone, and an imbalance of understanding leads to a truncated gospel, as I will illustrate. It should also be noted that I will primarily focus on the struggles of men.<sup>12</sup>

In the sections below, I will examine both Nigeria and the United States in light of the primary dimensions of the gospel employed by the church in order to combat pornography addiction, followed by the limitations of each approach. I will then propose a three-dimensional gospel-based approach to the issue of pornography, noting those aspects that will

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12 The inherent risk of this is to subtly add shame to women who are struggling with pornography addiction as if they were some kind of grotesque anomaly caught up in what is a male-only problem. Therefore, I want to start by affirming that the research is abundantly clear, both within the United States and abroad, that a significant percentage of women struggle with this as well. Ironically, one of the reasons I'm focusing on men is because pornography addiction radically hinders the ability of men to see women as created in the *Imago Dei*, thus exacerbating the issues of abuse and discrimination they already experience in male-dominated cultures.

resonate differently in each culture.

### **The United States**

The culture at large has become very accepting of pornography, yet there is clear schizophrenia at work. Traylor Lovvorn, Executive Director at *Undone Redone*, an organization that provides sexual addiction training and resources to assist the church, says, “the culture tells us, ‘If it feels good, do it. Get rid of all boundaries!’ Then when men actually follow that message, they say, ‘I can’t believe you would do that! Don’t you have any respect for women?’ The answer is clearly, ‘No, because the culture already told them that a steady diet of objectifying pornography is okay.’”<sup>13</sup>

The church in the United States, for all its orientation toward guilt, has not displayed much more self-control than the culture. Covenant Eyes reports the following among churchgoers:

- Forty-one percent of Christian males, 13-24, use porn at least once per month.
- Twenty-three percent of Christian males, 25 and over, use porn at least once per month.
- Fifteen percent of Christian women use porn at least once per month.
- One in five youth pastors use porn at least once per month.
- One in seven U.S. senior pastors use porn at least once per month.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Guilt/Innocence Behaviorism***

While the culture is growing in its orientation toward SH, the church remains clearly rooted in a certain GI understanding of the gospel, an approach I will refer to as *GI Behaviorism*. An FP understanding is sometimes present when it comes to the discussion of spiritual warfare, but outside of Pentecostals and charismatics, it is not a primary lens

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13 Traylor Lovvorn, interview by author, March 15, 2019. This comment was in response to the fact that there is a #MeToo movement that largely refuses to condemn pornography.

14 “Porn Stats 2018,” accessed February 8, [www.covenanteyes.com/lemonade/wp.../covenant-eyes-porn-stats-2018-edition.pdf](http://www.covenanteyes.com/lemonade/wp.../covenant-eyes-porn-stats-2018-edition.pdf).

through which to view pornography addiction. Traylor Lovvorn confirms that the large majority of resources are coming from a GI perspective of the gospel.<sup>15</sup> When the gospel fails to deal with shame, however, it tends toward a legalistic approach that has much more in common with what Lovvorn terms as “behavior modification.” In other words, justification is by faith, but ongoing sanctification is a work we do on our own. Instead of entering into our ongoing sin, God stands at a distance, waiting for us to pick ourselves up by our proverbial bootstraps. In *Surfing for God*, John Michael Cusick explains how this plays out in the church. “Understanding shame is crucial in our journey from lust and addiction to freedom. This can be especially confusing and complex in the church, where leaders and laypeople often use condemnation, judgment, and shame to motivate people toward the ‘right behavior.’”<sup>16</sup> Instead of helping to uncover the roots of shame and leading men toward healing, more shame is heaped upon them. Such an approach simply drives sin underground and solidifies a determination among men to never let anyone know their struggles. “Most Christians miss the gospel,” Lovvorn elaborates. “They say, ‘I have a sin problem, and now I have to fix it,’ which leads to all kinds of minimization of sin because we have to convince ourselves that it’s a fixable problem.”<sup>17</sup> Not only do they want to be able to handle the problem themselves, but it is normally a “quick fix” that is desired.

## Nigeria

“There is an epidemic that nobody is talking about,” writes Leke Babayomi, a Nigerian engineer in the aerospace industry. “We appear to be focused on physical and economic prosperity to the detriment of emotional, mental and spiritual prosperity. The well-being of the present generation is fast-declining due to pornography and its offshoots. . . . The pornography epidemic is real.”<sup>18</sup> Citing Google statistics, Subomi Plumptre writes:

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15 Lovvorn, interview. He also confirmed that this is changing.

16 Michael John Cusick, *Surfing for God: Discovering the Divine Desire Beneath Sexual Struggle* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 67.

17 Lovvorn, interview.

18 Leke Babayomi, “Combating the Pornography Addiction Epidemic,” accessed March 14, 2019, <https://www.bellanaija.com/2018/06/leke-babayomi-combating-pornography-addiction-epidemic/>.

In 2015, the popularity of Nigerian Google searches for porn (relative to other searches) on a scale of 0 to 100 was above 80. (Google ranks as 100 any item that constitutes 10% or more of all searches in a country). . . . The relative popularity of rape porn videos was also above 80. . . . In 2014, Nigeria ranked third globally for the most Google searches for Gay Porn.<sup>19</sup>

“I believe most Nigerians are FP-oriented first and SH-oriented second,” asserts Christson Adedoyin.<sup>20</sup> Although Adedoyin, a Nigerian professor in Samford University’s School of Public Health in Birmingham, Alabama, is entrenched in the world of Western education, he is not a “Westernized” Christian. His prayer life and view of the spirit world carry the clear marks of a fervent majority world Christianity. Like many Nigerian believers, his first instinct when dealing with the issue of pornography is to pray against the demonic powers oppressing the believer.<sup>21</sup> While Nigerians, unlike Americans, are generally in agreement that engaging in pornography is wrong, their reason for condemning it is rooted in FP. Explaining his culture in general, Adedoyin says that “they believe it’s wrong because it opens you up to a spiritual husband or wife. They believe that a Christian can allow themselves to be possessed. They tell you that ‘contact’ means ‘contract.’ Contact with pornography means contract with a spiritual husband or wife, which then opens them up to spiritual attacks, visiting a brothel, masturbation, etc.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, it is to be avoided ultimately

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19 Subomi Plumptre, “The Rise of Internet Porn & its Generational Impact,” accessed March 21, 2019, [https://subomiplumptre.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Nigeria-and-Sexuality\\_Subomi-Plumptre\\_March-11-2016.pdf](https://subomiplumptre.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Nigeria-and-Sexuality_Subomi-Plumptre_March-11-2016.pdf).

20 Christson Adedoyin, interview by author, March 8, 2019.

21 This is certainly not the case across the board among Nigerian Christians. For example, Leke Babayomi’s book, *Kill Porn Before it Kills You: Keys to Overcome the Three-Headed Monster of Lust, Pornography, and Masturbation*, reads much like an American Christian resource – outlining the problem and providing steps to overcome the problem. It includes prayer, but no emphasis on deliverance from demonic possession.

22 Adedoyin, interview. While Adedoyin has clear critiques of his culture’s over-emphasis of the spiritual, he does, in fact, believe in spiritual husbands and wives. The short explanation of a spiritual husband/wife is that, when someone has sex with a man or woman in their dreams who is not their spouse, it is a demon. When this subject came up in a class I was teaching, my instinct was to investigate a connection between this issue and pornography, which is why I interviewed him.

because of the consequences.

### *Deliverance Only*

Because the issue of pornography is seen by many Nigerian Christians as a demonic attack, the primary approach for healing is what I will call *Deliverance Only*. Similar to *GI Behaviorism*, it seeks a quick fix that leaves little room for the slow healing of root issues that takes place when SH gospel implications are taught and believed.

There are several unfortunate consequences of this particular one-dimensional approach. First, while blaming Satan or a demon has a certain convenience to it, it also carries a stigma and, inevitably, like *GI Behaviorism*, leads to a minimization of sin. In other words, a person having sex in their dreams with someone other than their spouse has a demon. The pornography addict has a demon as well, but the intensely prideful Christian leader wreaking havoc in the church is not seen to be possessed and needs no deliverance. The *Deliverance Only* approach not only overlooks personal responsibility for sin – thus, erasing the function of guilt – but it also seems to place an inordinate amount of blame on women. Adedoyin explains, “They’d rather play that there’s a power, demon, or stronghold that’s actually causing them to do this. And they tend to blame the woman, that she is an instrument of the Devil. Even when pastors abuse and take advantage of the women, the blame is put on the lady.”<sup>23</sup>

While it is not my intention to prove that *GI Behaviorism* and *Deliverance Only* are used by a majority of Christians in their respective countries, they are prevalent enough to serve as effective test cases that illustrate how one-dimensional gospel approaches to difficult cultural issues fall short. The true gospel, as Jayson Georges writes, “is a many-sided diamond, and God wants people in all cultures to experience his complete salvation.”<sup>24</sup> In the remainder of the paper, I will attempt to illustrate the depths of the gospel for the pornography addict by holding up the three facets of FP, SH, and GI to gospel light.

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23 Adedoyin, interview.

24 Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures*. (Time Press, 2017), chap. 1, Kindle.

## A THREE-DIMENSIONAL GOSPEL FOR THE PORNOGRAPHY ADDICT

### **Fear/Power Gospel**

*Creation and The Fall.* In the beginning, a loving and sovereign God created the entire universe by his powerful word. His power is absolute, and he rules over all of creation. He made humans in his own image and made them vice-regents, even letting them name the animals. After Satan rebelled against God's kingdom, he schemed against humanity and tempted Adam and Eve to seek power outside of the rule of God. As a result, humans lost their powerful position, causing fear and death to enter the world. Satan continually uses fear to tempt men and women to grasp at false idols of power they think will meet their needs, but all of them fail. "That's what the Devil is always up to," writes Russell Moore, "offering both the sin that rejects Christ but also the rescue plans that bypass Christ."<sup>25</sup>

God created sex to be enjoyed by a man and a woman, each created in his image and equal before him. As they serve the Lord, they are to serve each other in their different roles. After their nature was corrupted through sin, however, they were tempted to think of each other as less than the image of God. This view led men to seek power over women in order to use them to fulfill their sexual urges outside of the union of a loving marriage. Lust aroused a craving for men to use their strength to get what they want and to get it now.

In pornography, the man feels a false sense of control over the woman on the screen. At times the woman is smiling and flirting, making him feel wanted and secure. In other scenarios, he watches her say "no," only to see a man physically overtake her in rape, even successfully making her groan in ecstasy only minutes later. Either way, with a swipe or a simple click of a mouse, the user exercises complete control over the way he views the woman. In the end, man's grasp at sexual power always ends up the same way. Satan, having successfully tempted man to grasp for a false god, turns the tables and exerts his dominion over man.

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<sup>25</sup> Russell D. Moore, *The Gospel & Pornography* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, (2017), Introduction, Kindle.

While the FP perspective is obvious to Nigerians, Lovvorn admitted, “I’ve never thought about the FP paradigm,” but he then quickly related it to darker forms of pornography, such as BDSM.<sup>26</sup> A writer for a women’s student group at Appalachian State confidently explains, “A common myth about BDSM is that it is ‘all about pain.’ In actuality, it is about the exchange of power and pleasure.”<sup>27</sup> While it is obvious why someone desiring power would want to engage in BDSM as a “dominant,” according to Lovvorn there is a pattern in the genre where the person who seeks to be submissive is actually a powerful person in real life. In what could be seen as an unconscious recognition of the limits of their own strength, successful CEOs spend all day every day being sought after for answers and then proceed to gain pleasure in the night from being told what to do. In addition, there is a relatively new genre called POV (“Point of View”) that is filmed from the vantage point of the man. “You can put yourself in the scene. It’s easy for a man to feel powerful because they don’t feel that in real life, but they can go here and feel that domination.”<sup>28</sup>

### ***Redemption, Sanctification, and Glorification***

God brought freedom from the dominion of darkness through the incarnated Son, Jesus Christ, who inaugurated the kingdom of God. Satan offered Jesus partnership in his rule, but instead, Jesus remained intent on overthrowing his temporary kingdom and freeing everyone under the power of the Evil One. The demons thought they had triumphed when they crucified Jesus, but the plan backfired. Jesus disarmed the powers and authorities and demonstrated his supreme power by rising from the dead. Mankind must repent of following all other powers and submit to Jesus as sovereign Lord of their lives. As they do so, they are not left alone in their battle against Satan. God’s Holy Spirit, a much stronger spirit than those which exist in the world, indwells every believer. The apostle Paul explained to the Ephesians that there is “immeasurable greatness of power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he

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26 BDSM is roughly short for bondage, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism.

27 Amanda Ullman, “BDSM for Dummies,” accessed March 22, 2019, <https://www.hercampus.com/school/app-state/bdsm-dummies>.

28 Lovvorn, interview.

worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:19-20, ESV). He instructed the new followers of Jesus to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (Eph 6:10-11). Those who submit to the rule of God will one day reign with him in a new and glorious kingdom that will never end.

## Nigeria

Gailyn Van Rheezen defines animism as “the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power.”<sup>29</sup> The animistic background of Nigeria alerts the missiologist to the twin dangers Paul Hiebert warned us about – both secularism and a “Christianized form of animism.”<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, on the one hand, the missionary should not write off the reality of the spirit world in everyday events. To do so would not only hinder credibility, but it also would contradict Scripture, which alerts us to the fact that Satan is a prowling lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8, ESV). Even if it were successful, this approach would limit all of life to materialistic explanations. On the other hand, if the default approach to dealing with pornography addiction is *Deliverance Only*, there is potential to treat God’s Holy Spirit simply as a power to be wielded. According to Adedoyin, when people come to Christ, it is both to be saved from demonic powers and out of fear of being disconnected. They want to have a “super-power that is more powerful than their ancestral power.”<sup>31</sup> The story of Simon the Magician, however, serves as a stark warning to the person who desires to be in control of the Spirit of God, instead of vice versa (Acts 8:14-24).

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29 Gailyn Van Rheezen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena: CA: William Carey Library, 1991), 20.

30 Paul Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., edited by Steve Hawthorne and Ralph Winter. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 413.

31 Adedoyin, interview.

The practical question from all of this seems to be the following: “When encountering someone with a pornography addiction, do we pray for deliverance from the forces of darkness?” A subset of questions follows: “Is this a legitimate scenario where the missionary should be open to a power encounter?” “If we don’t deal directly with the demonic, will that diminish our credibility?” “Will praying against demonic oppression in this scenario help some and increase shame in others?” “How does the demonic realm influence people to give in to pornography?” “Is this to be considered *possession*, necessitating prayers of deliverance or is this to be considered demonic *influence*?” “When someone reveals they are having sex with someone in their dreams, do we dismiss the idea of a spirit husband/wife and instead ask if they are looking at pornography?” Lastly, “Is the choice of either a power encounter or teaching the deeper dimensions of the gospel a false dichotomy?” The answer to these questions will determine the course of action that a missionary or national church leader will pursue.

### **United States**

While stressing that the Bible instructs us to resist the Devil, Moore writes, “The pull to temptation, whether to pornography or to some other act of self-destruction, can feel so bewildering precisely because it is, quite literally, bedeviling. This is spiritual warfare.”<sup>32</sup> It would be a mistake, therefore, to think that a person who doesn’t believe in the spirit world does not need to know its underlying reality in their lives. Lovvorn asserts that there is an enemy who is “trying to take us out, but there’s a message that comes with the arrows. Most of us haven’t even understood the arrows, much less the message that we’ve been believing that comes from the arrows from our earliest memory. . . . What we help men do is to understand the faulty core of beliefs so that they can begin to repent at the belief level instead of behavior level.”<sup>33</sup>

One of the goals of *Undone Redone* is to help men to see that they are more than just their physical desires and that being a man does not mean a superficial show of strength. Instead, they are to seek the strength

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32 Russell Moore, *The Gospel & Pornography*, 36.

33 Lovvorn, interview.

that comes from being directly under the authority of our Sovereign Lord. Using a graphic illustration, Lovvorn elaborates. “I believe that when men learn to live fully erect as men, women open. Now is that a metaphor for sex or is sex a metaphor for that? Part of our ministry is helping men live fully alive in the big story (of Scripture), living fully erect, knowing their identity, and practicing strength under control. Pornography offers nothing but a cheap substitution.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Guilt/Innocence Gospel**

*Creation and The Fall.* The essence of God’s character is holiness. His righteousness and justice are above human understanding. In the beginning, God created man and woman in his image, placing them in a perfect garden and desiring that they worship him in holiness. Their sin against God’s clear command defiled them and placed a barrier between corrupted mankind and a perfect God. Because God cannot be in the presence of sin, he cast them out of the garden.

The law of Moses, as made clear in the Ten Commandments, forbade adultery to the Israelites. Those who transgressed this law were guilty of a heinous sin. While the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day understood this command, punishing the guilty with fervor, they overlooked their own iniquity. Jesus exposed this minimization of sin by teaching that those who look on a woman with lust have already committed adultery in their hearts (Matt 5:27-28). Modern pornography has the dramatic effect of stoking the fires of lust within men and heaping a million gallons of gasoline into their souls. Lust leads men to engage in pornography, and pornography multiplies lust and guilt before a holy God.

### ***Redemption, Sanctification, and Glorification***

Although God provided Israel a temporary means to be forgiven through the sacrificial system, this was ultimately a foreshadowing of the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. He died on the cross bearing the full weight of our guilt. His resurrection defeated death and Hell, the penalty for our sin. In Jesus, “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7, ESV). Because

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34 Ibid.

we cannot earn his forgiveness by any human effort, we are to simply place our faith in Jesus and trust him with our lives. Following Jesus in faith means that we daily repent of sin, allowing the Holy Spirit to fill us and empower us to holy living. We will not be perfect in this life, but in the life to come, there will be no sin. Unrepentant sinners, however, will be forever cast out of the presence of God.

## **Nigeria**

The holiness of God and the guilt of our transgressions are absolute truths, regardless of whether or not we *feel* guilty. The New Testament letters reveal a pattern that begins with the foundation of forgiveness by grace through faith, then progresses to command specific repentance. Nowhere is the church excused of sin on the basis of being possessed by the Devil. While the missionary and national believer should deal frankly with the demonic, they should not neglect the holiness of God by letting people believe they are innocent of their own actions. Instead, they should gently lead them toward repentance and help them with clear action steps to change their behavior in the strength of the Holy Spirit. The primary question to be answered, however, is “Do we lead with GI or do we start by connecting with FP or SH truths?”

Given that GI cultures tend to favor a scientific view of reality, it is appropriate at this point to ask what role the missionary should give to the scientific evidence behind pornography addiction. As previously discussed, we do not want to replace animism with secularism. In addition, there may be barriers that hinder receptivity. Adedoyin explains:

Our culture has come to the point to where everything that happens has a spiritual undertone. . . . If a building collapses, they don't look at the structural defect and, instead, see bloodsucking demons in the area. That's why the science would have a problem. . . . They would not accept the fact that there are neurological parts of your brain that, because of chemical releases, cause reinforcement of behavior. Science? Oh my goodness! That's going to be a tough sell. They'd rather go for the explanation that there is a spiritual

husband or wife.<sup>35</sup>

### **United States**

The West generally is grounded in a GI understanding of sin. Coupled with a scientific view of reality, this makes the church prone to a *GI Behaviorism* approach, as discussed above. While a GI understanding of sin does not, in fact, necessitate a legalistic understanding of the gospel, the lack of understanding of how the SH dimension of the gospel relates to us as beloved sons and daughters of the king open us up to such a misunderstanding (This will be addressed below). Nevertheless, while the church consistently sees through the lens of GI, the culture at large is slowly changing toward an SH paradigm. Therefore, we should not assume that all Americans have either a strong sense of guilt or a complete lack of shame over their use of pornography.

### **Shame/Honor Gospel**

*Creation and the Fall.* God is an eternal and glorious king. He has always existed and is the essence of true honor. He created Adam and Eve in a sublime universe as a way to share his glory and honor. Their very purpose was to glorify God, honoring and enjoying him forever. Their name was perfectly honorable, and their inheritance was secure. They walked naked and were unashamed, having perfect intimacy with the Lord and with each other. “To be naked and unashamed before God,” Cusick explains, “meant that Adam and Eve were both free and able to offer to God exactly who they were, without holding anything back or hiding their true selves. They were fully known, just as they were created to be, and they were fully okay with that. This led to an uninhibited intimacy with God and with each other.”<sup>36</sup>

One day they decided to seek a status outside of what God had given them – an honor they could both earn and manufacture themselves. The betrayal brought shame on Adam and Eve, causing God to lose face from the dishonorable act. Because God had to protect his dignity, he banished them from the beautiful garden in which they had lived together in perfect

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35 Adedoyin, interview.

36 Cusick, *Surfing for God*, 69.

harmony. The descendants of Adam and Eve have inherited both their name and their shame. Our various cultural attempts to create honor on our own disconnect us from each other as everyone grasps for titles and status to make us feel superior. Our sin (gossip, anger, sexual immorality, war, racism, etc.) is mostly from our futile attempts at self-honor. In the end, it only increases shame and further separates the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve as we see everywhere echoes of the Fall. As Cusick points out, “Even in the garden, shame’s first words to Adam and Eve were, ‘You’d better go hide.’”<sup>37</sup>

When young men begin to engage in pornography, they commonly feel a heightened status as they impress their friends with newfound knowledge of sexuality. Young men not looking at porn feel shame in such situations, feeding their embarrassment and disconnection with each other. There is a false sense of intimacy lingering underneath the surface, however, even for men who believe they are only looking for physical pleasure. Our innate desire for true community – to be really known – drives us to seek the counterfeit, as we are too ashamed to show others who we really are. Cusick elaborates:

Augustine taught about the theological idea of *incurvatus se* – a life turned in on itself. Porn successfully accomplishes this – it causes our soul to turn in on itself in self-absorbed isolation and shame. . . . It seduces a man to use women to meet a need in himself – without meeting any of her needs. And this act of ‘using’ comes not only at her expense but also at the devastating cost of his own heart.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Redemption, Sanctification, and Glorification***

Because God still loved mankind, he made a way to restore their honor. He covenanted with Abraham to honor him with many descendants who would ultimately bless all families of the earth. Israel (Abraham’s descendants) inherited the covenant and were given the Torah as a way to honor God among the nations. Although they were often disloyal and ended up in exile, just like Adam and Eve, God satisfied the demands

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37 Cusick, *Surfing for God*, 69.

38 Ibid., 9.

of his own honor through his Son. Jesus was filled with the same honor and distinction as God the Father. He chose to be with the marginalized of society, filling them with the unexpected honor of his presence. He touched the sick and was not defiled. He even honored sexual sinners with his presence, causing the religious leaders of his day to heap shame upon him. Undeterred, this did not change how Jesus felt about sinners. “He didn’t shame sexually broken people. When he encountered a Samaritan woman with a history of failed relationships, he offered her a drink of living water.”<sup>39</sup>

Jesus sabotaged the false honor code of the people by seeking only God’s honor while freely granting it to others. Eventually, he was stripped, beaten, and shamed through a bloody death on a cross. It was on this cross, however, that he bore the shame of humanity, breaking its power, and he triumphed over death as God raised him from the dead.

Jesus is now able to offer a new status as beloved and honored sons and daughters to all those who reject society’s counterfeit honor and place their identity in him as adopted children. Paul wrote that “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:4-5). Those whom he chooses inherit his honorable name and a new status as honored princes and princesses in a kingdom that will last forever.

## **United States**

It is true that the culture of the United States is individualistic and GI-oriented, but it would be a mistake to think that shame is not both intuitively understood and intensely felt. Lovvorn says that “shame is at play all the time, but you must properly name it to see its impact.” Relating his own experience of recovery, he says:

I was simply looking at pornography as a spiritual/behavioral problem. I didn’t understand the physiological – the dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin – and I also didn’t understand that there were

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39 Cusick, *Surfing for God*, 71.

certain feelings and emotions that I'll call 'shame' that I didn't like. So the pornography 'hit' made me feel better as I was constantly medicating these deeper needs I'd never addressed.<sup>40</sup>

Because men feel as if they should be in control and have the answers, it is shameful to have emotions that reveal that they are not, in fact, in control. Therefore, says Lovvorn, "the reality is that we've got wounded boys in adult bodies wreaking havoc on our culture because they haven't properly addressed their wounds."

The real breakthrough for Lovvorn in his struggle against pornography was the realization that God still loved him even in his sin and relentless negative emotions. "It was a foreign concept that God wanted to join me in my struggle with pornography." It was when he understood the truth that he was an adopted – and *beloved* – son of God and that his identity was not based on what he had done to earn God's approval, that the sting of shame was defeated, and he found the strength to recover. In addition, it is precisely the continued belief in the gospel, Lovvorn affirms, that has been the ongoing antidote to the shame the Evil One wants to cast on him. As Andrew Comiskey wrote, "Shame is the raincoat over the soul repelling the living water of Jesus that would otherwise establish us as the beloved of God."<sup>41</sup> When we believe that no one can truly know us and still love us, however, we both refuse the gospel and hide from others.

Laying his theological cards on the table, Lovvorn points to what was ultimately a theological change of mind. "For me, the Arminian perspective says this: 'I chose God, so I have a good chooser. He's knocking at the door and finally I opened it. . . . What drove some of my shame is that I kept choosing pornography. If I've got such a good chooser, I should be able to say 'no' to this.'" He referred to the common illustration of salvation as Jesus throwing a life ring out of the boat for individuals to grab. Instead, Lovvorn explains that "it would be more accurate to say that we were dead and decaying at the bottom of the ocean and Jesus dove in, pulled us up,

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40 Lovvorn, interview.

41 Andrew Comiskey, *Strength in Weakness: Healing Sexual and Relational Brokenness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2003), 69.

and breathed life into our rotting corpse.” Finally, he concluded, “Maybe he chose me.’ And when I made that switch, everything fell into line, because I could not battle pornography when I thought I chose God. It put me at the starting point, unable to execute the first of the twelve steps of recovery – admitting powerlessness.”<sup>42</sup> The shift that has made him and many others victorious is when they finally realized that, as believers, they were beloved sons and, consequently, felt the smile of a loving Father. It should be noted here that it was in the realm of SH that he and many others have found the antidote to the legalistic *GI Behaviorism*. Furthermore, while understanding the struggle in terms of FP, especially spiritual warfare, was important, it was not something that could be described as “the key” to winning the battle for him or the other American Christians he has led through sex addiction recovery.

To further defeat the power of shame, *Undone Redone* and other pornography recovery ministries also emphasize the importance of community.<sup>43</sup> When believers try to battle pornography in isolation, the shame-filled voices become louder. In Monica Lewinsky’s famous 2015 Ted Talk entitled, “The Price of Shame,” she revealed the secret of overcoming the intense and tragically unique experience resulting from both poor choices made in her early twenties and the advent of cable news. When everyone else shunned her and made jokes at her expense, there were others who entered into her life and remained friends regardless. Her conclusion was that “shame cannot survive empathy.”<sup>44</sup>

In the gospel, God himself enters our shameful state, granting us worth and status beyond comprehension simply because of his presence. Furthermore, as beloved sons and daughters enter into each other’s presence as saved sinners, opening up with who they really are, what would otherwise be crushing public shame is instead defeated by loving empathy. This shame-crushing rediscovery of the gospel, Lovvorn points out, is the

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42 Lovvorn, interview.

43 Although accountability is inherent within the process, Lovvorn’s emphasis was on community. I don’t remember a specific discussion about accountability, which seems to be the primary emphasis elsewhere.

44 Monica Lewinsky, “The Price of Shame,” accessed November 2018, [https://www.ted.com/talks/monica\\_lewinsky\\_the\\_price\\_of\\_shame?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/monica_lewinsky_the_price_of_shame?language=en).

bright ray of hope in the midst of the pornography epidemic, as believers who have been trying to earn God's approval are forced to fall helplessly into the arms of a loving Father.

### **Nigeria<sup>45</sup>**

The insights above concerning an SH understanding for Americans are extremely relevant and powerful for Nigerian Christians as well. The context is what is different. Americans feel shame in an intensely personal way, but the public aspect of it is something that is only beginning to catch up to true SH cultures such as Nigeria. Brené Brown defines honor as “the worth or value of persons both in their eyes and in the eyes of their village, neighborhood, or society. . . . The critical item is the public nature of respect and reputation.”<sup>46</sup> Shame, therefore, can be understood not only in the experience of believing that we are unworthy but also in the fear of losing face and being disconnected from the community. Zeba Crook elaborates on this idea by pointing to the social dynamic in biblical cultures. “Shame among the males with honor . . . was not an *emotion*, but a *demotion*.”<sup>47</sup>

There are two important implications here when it comes to dealing with pornography addiction in an SH-oriented culture. First of all, sin should be understood not simply in GI terminology, but by employing the biblical language pervasive in the Bible related to shame and honor. Georges and Baker, elaborating on the Westminster Catechism, explain. “Morality revolves around a God-honoring faith. Bringing honor and glory to God functions as the ethical standard. This implies there are situations in which people ‘sin’ without ever breaking a rule or commandment (Rom. 14:21-23). According to Romans 3:23, the target all humans miss is properly

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45 It is more of a side note to point out that many people say that you can't talk about sex in SH cultures. While it's true that a missionary or national Christian in Nigeria should exercise caution when dealing with the issue, they should never use the logic that “they don't talk about it here” as an excuse to avoid engagement. Just one of many reasons for this can be illustrated by the following comment from Adedoyin: “They don't talk about sexual issues in the church or even for people who are getting married. So people use pornography as an excuse to learn.”

46 Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parents, and Lead* (New York: Gotham, 2012), 59.

47 Zeba A. Crook, *Reconceptualizing Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 45.

glorifying God, not an impersonal legal code of moral behavior.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, pornography use should be explained as dishonoring the Father and shaming the naked woman, created in his image. It is shameful behavior that radically impacts God’s design for marriage and family. Perhaps it is this approach to understanding sin that would lead to a conviction otherwise lacking in an FP culture primarily concerned with manipulating spiritual powers for their own ends.

Another issue within a culture heavily tilted toward understanding spiritual power as impersonal is that people are less likely to seek a personal relationship with God, much less intimacy with him. Nearness to God, however, is what the Scriptures offer. Perhaps when it is made clear that pornography draws us inward and disconnects believers from true community, the corresponding freedoms from this addiction will both be clearly grasped and warmly cherished. Whereas American Christians resonate with *beloved* son, Nigerian Christians will most likely resonate with *honored* son. Perhaps when the incredible honor given to the believer is made plain, it will be this facet in the gospel diamond that holds the other two in place.

## CONCLUSION

When pornography addiction is examined through the missiological lenses of FP, SH, and GI, the limitations of each culture’s gospel orientation become clear. Americans imbalanced toward GI tend to drift toward a legalistic understanding of the gospel that overlooks both spiritual warfare and how Jesus enters our shameful condition to help us with our sin. Nigerians imbalanced toward an FP understanding of spiritual power forsake personal responsibility for sin and neglect the innate desire for honor that is so prevalent in their own culture. Both of these approaches seek a “quick fix” which diverts their attention from deeper gospel truths and the roots of their own behavior. Ultimately, all three dimensions of the gospel are biblical, relevant, and extraordinarily helpful for all believers, regardless of culture.

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48 Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker. *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 209.

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