



How does pornography skew God’s design for human creation and desire?

by **Luke Humphrey** and **Kaleb Turner**

## 'A WAR AND NOT A BATTLE'

Senior Jacob Chesney was only 10 years old when he first found himself victim to a new corner of the internet that would define his relationships and self-perception.

Years after he first discovered pornography, Chesney realized that his viewing habits might have started to become a real problem — a problem that would prove to be difficult to solve all at once and on his own.

“I was dating a girl, and I felt bad that I was watching porn while I was dating her,” Chesney said. “I tried to just put it away and stop looking at it. Over a few months, I just realized that I kept coming back to it no matter how hard I tried.”

The problem, Chesney said, was never as simple as a cold-turkey approach — and it still is not that simple.

“Over the last two years or so, I’ve had times where I will go a month without pornography, which was great, but then I’d get back into it just as heavy,” Chesney said. “Over time, those long streaks grew. I think it is a war and not a battle.”

Also at 10 years old, senior Brennan Puryear found himself with the internet’s possibilities at his fingertips. Like Chesney, Puryear said he realized a problem existed when he was in high school, calling pornography the hardest addiction.

“With pornography, it’s so easy,” Puryear said. “It’s on your phone, in movies, etc.”

The “hardest addiction” was one that both Puryear and Chesney felt they could not fight alone and sought solace in others.

Chesney began seeking help for his addiction when he came to Harding. During his sophomore year, he sought counseling services at the Harding Counseling Center, and while he said that put him on the track to recovery, he soon realized others must become a part of his internal struggle.

“I thought I could overcome my addiction on my own, so that’s why it took me so long to seek help,” Chesney said. “It sounds simple — just don’t watch it or just don’t do it. But it’s way more complicated and takes so much more effort and thought.”

Puryear’s road to a resolution also began by telling someone else, but in taking that step, he accepted a level of vulnerability he said was one of the most challenging parts.

“One of the harder things I did was tell my parents,” Puryear said. “For me, that was really rough. For the longest time, it felt like there was a barrier between us, but I think talking about it and acknowledging that you have a problem is a good start.”

After taking the first step in telling someone of their deep emotional and spiritual challenges, Puryear and Chesney found that their friend groups became a trusted resource in dealing with their years-long addictions.

Sharing their experiences made Puryear and Chesney aware that their struggle is not unique. Kraig Martin, assistant professor of Bible, talks about pornography and sexual ethics in his classes, and said the commonality of pornography addiction is found in 21st century technology.

“The literature suggests that with high-speed internet and easy access to high-speed internet, you cannot find college-aged or older males who have not consumed online pornography,” Martin said. “If that’s right, then that gives you a sense of the scale of this problem.”

As Chesney and Puryear found solace in their personal

communities, Martin said a similar sentiment is echoed in seeing students embrace one another when discussion about the topic arises in his classes.

“When students find the courage to speak up, I’ve never heard anyone be shamed by it,” Martin said.

Chesney and Puryear said they wish they knew many things when they realized their viewing habits had become an addiction. They wished they knew they were not alone, and they wished the church would have been less taboo on the topic. They wished they knew to rely on strong relationships, and they simply wished they had known to do all of this sooner.

“In high school, I never talked about this,” Puryear said. “I put it into my head that I was the only one struggling with it. I don’t think I’d be willing to fix it if I weren’t at Harding.”

## 'GREAT EXPECTATIONS GOT US ALL IMITATING'

“We’re secretly out of control, nobody knows me; And my friends all addicted to porn can’t keep a girlfriend; Cause the great expectations got all us imitating.”

These lyrics from singer-songwriter Jon Bellion’s “Morning in America” hit home with Puryear when he first heard them. He found his pornography addiction crossing borders into other areas of his life and relationships.

“I remember listening to that song and thinking that was me,” Puryear said. “I had a relationship where I felt a lot of guilt because of the porn. It felt like I was in the relationship where I wanted other things out of it.”

His friendships suffered, too — specifically his relationships with women. Pornography had quickly become something that was no longer just a “me” issue.

“For a man, you see women differently,” Puryear said. “I have female friends now, but I had none in high school because there was always something in my head that caused that to not happen. There’s the part of your brain that seeks pleasure that I got used to so quickly.”

Seeing women differently is just the tip of the iceberg when considering pornography use, according to Martin. Under the surface, Martin said viewing pornography results in misconstrual of sex, desire and fulfillment in a way that is outside the scope of God’s original intent for creation.

“Sexuality is so broken in our culture that we don’t even have a vision of what it’s supposed to look like, so it’s hard for us to understand how it’s going wrong,” Martin said.

Understanding is a key part to moving past an addiction, according to Martin, and it finds root in acknowledging the parties impacted by pornography of any type.

“Sex — the way it’s supposed to be — is something that connects us to another person and fulfills our need to be known and loved. Pornography use is not that,” Martin said. “It’s done in isolation, alone and disconnected from other people.”

## A MEANS TO AN END

So, for the nearly six in 10 young adults who, according to a Barna study, seek out pornography on a daily, weekly

or monthly basis, what is the answer to a problem that will always be just one click away?

Chesney, Puryear and Martin all say that one crucial step to the process is for society and the church to destigmatize the topic.

“By never talking about it or mentioning the word, we have given it a lot more power than it deserves and that it actually has,” Chesney said.

Personally, Chesney has found his experiences in the church completely lacking in any conversation from the pulpit or the youth group classroom — an unfortunate truth that he said only exacerbates the problem.

While Chesney said he thinks the church largely keeps away from the topic to keep from stepping on so many toes, he believes the negative repercussions of avoidance are surmounting.

“In doing that, it has put this false image in a lot of young people that people in the church do not struggle with it,” Chesney said. “It makes it seem like the preacher doesn’t know anything about pornography. When youth groups don’t talk about it, it very easily makes it seem like you’re the only one who watches it and that no one will understand.”

While Puryear found his church experiences to be plentiful in conversations about pornography — he said his pastor at home has been open about talking about addiction and never turns anyone away from the topics — he believes Harding has some strides to make, too, in removing the stigma.

“I just really want Harding to be a place where [it’s ok to] acknowledge that porn is a problem,” Puryear said. “It’s always ‘If you’re struggling, here’s a meeting.’ Sometimes, it’s difficult to just rely on God. Truthfully, you also need to rely on other people. With a group, you can do that for God.”

Although Puryear and Chesney have seen Harding and the church sometimes miss the beat, Martin said society, both religious and secular, have started to identify the real biological and emotional distresses rooted in pornography use.

“We’re hitting a stage where people inside and outside the church are starting to realize something is wrong with the pornography consumption,” Martin said. “The shift that I’ve seen is the recognition of something being broken. I think you can see that shift has happened by examining governments that are pushing for this to be a health risk. The language around it is changing.”

Chesney, Puryear and Martin also agree that capitalizing on society’s progress with the conversation around the topic is another big step.

That capitalization does not come easy, though. Puryear and Chesney said, having both struggled for years with a pornography addiction, that it will never be as easy as just saying no. It is an ongoing struggle — a war and not a battle.

“Eventually, it will get better, but it takes time,” Chesney said. “There’s probably a lot of days you want to quit, but it’s worth it to get away from it.”

And in putting in the hard work to move past it, Puryear said that he sees an understanding of sin and struggle as human nature is key.

“I know there have been a lot of chapel talks about how it’s sick and it’s wrong,” Puryear said. “Well, it is sick and wrong, but I think it should be approached as, ‘It’s sick and it’s wrong, but it’s OK.’ I want to talk to anyone who is struggling with it and say, ‘I know what you’re going through. It’s a long process, but it can be done. I’m still going through it.’”

## A human problem

by **Danielle Turner**

While pornography addiction is primarily referred to as an issue for men, many women also struggle with pornography and feel too ashamed to talk about it.

Director of Upward Bound and Professor of Psychology Stephanie O’Brien said it is harder for women to speak up about their struggles with pornography because society does not view or accept women as sexual creatures in the same way men are.

“We always focus on guys and pornography and it is sort of labeled as a male issue, but in terms of the number of students who have talked to me about it, it is probably equal,” O’Brien said.

Isolation is a common struggle in addiction. O’Brien said feeling alone stems from unwillingness to have conversations about taboo topics. Junior Jessica Pigott said the main reason she never spoke up about her struggle with pornography is because of the shame associated with women watching porn.

“Women are not allowed to be sexual beings, but if you are sexual, guys are supposed to like you,” Pigott said. “You come from a place where you are trying to fill that void and

then you realize what you’ve done, and you feel disgusting and shameful, and then that void gets bigger and deeper and then you’re just repeating that cycle over and over again.”

The issue does not stop with the way women are viewed compared to men. Women are rarely addressed when having conversations about the harmful qualities of pornography and its long-term effect. Dennis Rine, a guidance counselor at Harding Academy, said many girls start watching pornography to learn how to be accepted by boys and in turn create a skewed, damaged view of sexuality.

Dennis said over the past few years, he has seen the church make strides in its willingness to have an honest conversation about pornography, but there is still hesitation to admit that the issue affects women as well. Pigott felt the same way growing up. In her youth group, church leaders would address pornography is a problem for boys and that girls needed to support the boys through their struggle.

Terri Rine, adjunct professor of Bible, teaches an all-women’s section of the Christian families course and said they spend time looking at God’s plan for sexuality, and pornography is often brought up to recognize what is unhealthy for relationships.

“We’re not immune to this,” Terri said. “I recognize we don’t have as big of a problem as men, but we have a

problem. There are a whole lot more women involved in it than you think.”

A study done by Covenant Eyes, an internet accountability and filtering service, states 79 percent of men ages 18 to 30 said they watch porn more than once a month. In that same study, they found 76 percent of women ages 18 to 30 watch porn more than once a month.

In the Covenant Eyes study, research shows that women prefer romance sites and erotic stories over any sort of graphic sexual content. Sophomore Abbey Richter was introduced to pornography through erotic stories and said that she would justify reading it because it was different than watching it.

“I just sooner wished that someone had said straight to my face reading it, watching it, thinking about it. It is all terrible for your health and your walk with God,” Richter said.

Richter said one thing she loves about Harding is the Porn Kills Love signs around campus. Porn Kills Love, a movement by Fight The New Drug, an organization that aims to educate people about the harmful effects of pornography on individuals and relationships, said it best when they said, “Pornography is not a male problem. It is a human problem.”

