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BETHEL UNIVERSITY
BETHEL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

EXPLORING THE NEED FOR NON-SHAME BASED THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES FOR
THE TREATMENT OF PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION

A THESIS PROJECT REPORT
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
MINA SHAHEID
PHILADLEPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA
MAY 2023

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ABSTRACT

This research underscores that pornography addiction is an addictive disorder that poses extremely serious threats to the lives and wellbeing of many people worldwide. Pornography addiction is a type of sexual addiction characterized by its compulsive nature that harms many areas of the life of an addict. Shame and addiction are deeply interconnected, making it extremely difficult for an addict to realize his or her value and self-worth. Moreover, the research purports that people who are religiously committed suffer more severely from the emotion of shame than those who are nonreligious. Shame-proneness reinforces emotions of self-loathing and despair, leading to further self-defeating behaviors. As a result, this project links a robust positive relationship between religiosity and shame related to pornography addiction that is mediated by a moral disapproval of the behavior.

Therefore, this research establishes that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, according to the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church, can serve as a non-shame-based treatment for pornography addiction. The project investigates three primary concerns, which are: (a) the impacts of shame on the persistence of the use of pornography for sexual gratification, (b) the need for the concealment of the behavior and the avoidance of participation in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession due to shame, and (c) on the intensification of the use of pornography within the Coptic Orthodox communities in the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia. The research findings were based on three primary data sources, which are biblical-theological reflections, related literature, and field research, while describing a series of integrated conclusions.

CHAPTER ONE: THE NEED FOR NON-SHAME BASED TREATMENT FOR PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION

Statement of the Problem

The problem this research will address is exploring the need for a non-shame-based therapeutic approach that incorporates integrative processes of Christian doctrine and professional counseling approaches for the treatment of pornography addiction and the shame associated with its addiction. In response to the problem, the researcher will (a) study the biblical story of King David, exploring the topics of shame, addiction, and restoration found primarily in 1 Sam. 11 and Ps. 51, (b) research current literature on addiction to pornography, criteria for addiction to pornography, possible role of dopamine on addiction to pornography, and shame related to addiction to pornography, (c) conduct qualitative research by interviewing Coptic Orthodox priests who administer the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, in order to determine how pornography addicts, their partners, their religious convictions, and their personal relationships are impacted by pornography addiction, and detect how shame hinders treatment, and (d) identify non-shame based therapeutic approaches to help in the treatment of pornography addiction.

Delimitations

The research will be limited to Coptic Orthodox priests ministering the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia.

The research will be limited to a study of the following Scripture passages (2 Sam. 11 and Psalm 51) for themes of addiction, shame, and restoration.

The research will be limited to a literature review on pornography addiction, shame, and available treatments.

Assumptions

The first assumption is that the God of Christianity requires holiness, integrity, and self-control against sin.

The second assumption is that Biblical doctrine preaches hope, victory, and restoration through Jesus Christ.

The third assumption is that the continued engagement in using pornography for sexual gratification, regardless of its negative outcomes and loss of control over one's life, relationships and daily activities, is a form of behavioral addiction that needs treatment.

The fourth assumption is that integration of Biblical tenets and professional counseling can produce a powerful mode for the treatment of pornography addiction and shame related to it.

The fifth assumption is that sexual sins cause shame, distress, and distortion of self-image.

The sixth assumption is that religious beliefs and cultural perspectives of pornography for Coptic Orthodox Christians can lead to a sense of shame and distortion of self-image.

The seventh assumption is that non-shame-based therapeutic approaches are useful for the treatment of pornography addiction.

The eighth assumption is that addiction is all-consuming, dominating every element of the human person.

The ninth assumption is that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, according to the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church can serve as a non-shame-based treatment for pornography addiction and shame related to it.

The tenth assumption is that in Christianity there is no place for shame or despair but a constant renewal of hope.

Definitions

Addiction: originates from Latin, meaning enslaved or bound by something.¹ It is an unmanageable compulsion to repeat a behavior in spite of its adverse consequences.

Confession: pronouncing aloud one's own sins or wrongdoings as an expression of inward repentance.²

Hypersexuality: an obsessive–compulsive type of disorder, marked by repetitive behaviors intended to minimize or prevent personal anxiety or distress.³

Non-shame-based-therapy: a counseling modality characterized by interventions that focus on emotion regulation, psychological reform, and behavior modification for the treatment of behavioral addictions designed to recognize shame and its hindrances to recovery.

Obsessions: persistent and recurrent intrusive thoughts, feelings, fantasies or urges, which are driven by an anticipated relief from anxiety or distress.⁴

Pornography: any sexually explicit or stimulating material that is intended to be or to be used as a sexual outlet.⁵ It is any imagery that depicts actions presumed to be overtly sexual and erotic in nature that is purposed for sexual gratification.

Pornography Addiction: a dysfunctional pattern of excessive exposure to sexually stimulating material that manifests in physiological, psychological, and cognitive symptoms.

¹ Michael Ascher and Petros Levounis, *The Behavioral Addictions* (Arlington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2015), xi.

² Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2009), 293.

³ Short et al., “Clinicians’ Beliefs, Observations, and Treatment Effectiveness Regarding Clients’ Sexual Addiction and Internet Pornography Use,” *Community Mental Health Journal* 52 (2016): 1070.

⁴ John Bancroft and Zoran Vukadinovic, “Sexual Addiction, Sexual Compulsivity, Sexual Impulsivity, or What? Toward a Theoretical Model,” *Journal of Sex Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 225.

⁵ Amanda Giordano, *A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions: Conceptualizations, Assessments, and Clinical Strategies* (New York: Springer Publishing, 2022), 99.

Symptoms of pornography addiction include continuance, intentionality, loss of control, reduction of meaningful activities, excessive time spent in preparing, engaging or recovering from the behavior, increased tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms.⁶ It is a compulsive attempt to satisfy an emotional need through viewing pornographic paraphernalia and gaining sexual gratification, ultimately through masturbation.⁷

Pornography Craving: a temporary but strong urge or desire that intensifies and increases over time and is a relatively constant preoccupation or inclination for pornography use.⁸

Professional Counseling: a field of study that seeks to understand human behavior, address maladaptive human behavior, and provide tools to correct dysfunctional human behavior. It focuses on the importance of doing evidence-based treatments, which are researched approaches and techniques intended to produce best results.⁹

Repentance: an act of determination for correction, a firm intention for the removal of sin, and a resolve to combat evil inclinations.¹⁰

Sexual Addiction: a disorder characterized by intrusive and obsessive sexual cravings, thoughts, and fantasies.¹¹

⁶ Ester Leutenberg and John Liptak, *The Sex Addiction Workbook: Information, Assessments, and Tools for Managing Life with a Behavioral Addiction* (Duluth: Whole Person Associates, 2021), v.

⁷ Kevin Skinner, *Treating Pornography Addiction: The Essential Tool for Recovery* (Lindon: K. Skinner Corp., 2005), 22.

⁸ Giordano, *A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions*, 110.

⁹ John Thomas and Lisa Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition: Equipping the Christian Counselor for the Journey* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 21, 49.

¹⁰ Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 293.

¹¹ Caponnetto et al., "Sexual Addiction, Hypersexual Behavior and Relative Psychological Dynamics during the Period of Social Distancing and Stay-at-Home Policies Due to COVID-19," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 2704 (2022): 2.

Sexual Satiation: a feeling that takes place when a person's sexual urge is either gratified or reaches the state at which it begins to decline.¹²

Shame: an emotion or perception that a person's value and self-worth have depreciated due to a specific behavior or conduct. Researchers characterize shame as a feeling that is hugely associated with a person's own sense of self-worth, while being disconnected from any interactions with other people.¹³

Treatment: a method of preventing, combating, curing, or managing a disease, disorder, or maladaptation.¹⁴

Subproblems

The first subproblem is to explore selected Scripture passages (2 Sam. 11 and Psalm 51) for themes of addiction, shame, and restoration.

The second subproblem is to review current literature on addiction to pornography and shame related to it. Focus will be given to the following areas of pornography addiction: role of dopamine, criteria for addiction, and shame.

The third subproblem is to conduct a qualitative case study, using interviews with priests of the Coptic Orthodox Church who administer the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, to determine the impact of pornography addiction and shame on the Coptic Orthodox community within the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia.

¹² Walton et al., "Hypersexuality: A Critical Review and Introduction to the "Sexbehavior Cycle,"" *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 46 (2017): 2243.

¹³ Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2015), 63.

¹⁴ Douglas Anderson, *Mosby's Dictionary of Medicine, Nursing & Health Professions* (St. Louis: Mosby Elsevier, 2006), 1887.

The fourth subproblem will be to identify non-shame-based therapeutic approaches to help in the treatment of pornography addiction and shame related to it.

Setting of the Project

The larger setting of this project is the Coptic Orthodox churches in the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia. These states are comprised of numerous Coptic Orthodox churches, counseling facilities, youth centers, educational institutions, and outreach organizations.

Importance of the Problem to the Researcher

The problem is important to the researcher because, as an orthodox priest, the researcher notices growing predicaments with pornography among male and female confessors. Internet pornography content, exposure, and accessibility have increased exponentially in recent years.¹⁵ Pornography's convenience of instant commitment-free sexual gratification has resulted in a rapid transformation of the occasional salacious fantasy into a habitual behavior with extremely problematic outcomes. According to data provided by Pornhub, a pornographic website, 92 million internet users visit the site each day, adding that 33.5 billion visits with over 207,000 pornographic videos are being watched every minute.¹⁶ Presently, lawmakers in 17 of the 50 U.S. states have passed resolutions declaring pornography a public-health crisis, leading to the rise of recovery websites.¹⁷

From my experience as a Coptic Orthodox priest, confessors seeking religious guidance express shame and loss of self-control. Penitents express that their religious beliefs and cultural

¹⁵ Giordano, "A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions," 100.

¹⁶ Giordano, "A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions," 100.

¹⁷ Giordano, "A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions," 100.

perspectives burden them with a heavy sense of shame, preventing them from seeking treatment for their addiction. Hidden shame leads to problematic psychological symptoms such as avoidance, anger, and rage.¹⁸ It also results in self-destructive behaviors in an attempt to regulate the overwhelmingly painful feelings. Couples seeking pastoral counseling report dishonesty, isolation, and betrayal. Singles describe a preoccupation that decreases their ability to establish healthy, intimate and long-term monogamous relationships. Adults recovering from sexual addiction easily relapse due to pornography use, oftentimes causing more deleterious outcomes than experienced before. Research suggests that shame is related to a greater chance of relapse, triggering feelings of inadequacy, intensifying the behavior, and reinforcing the addiction.¹⁹

Importance of the Problem for Ministry

This research is extremely important for ministry purposes as it provides individuals who offer pastoral care within churches and religious institutions necessary tools for the treatment of pornography addiction. The research will be a guide for priests and pastors to provide a new modality for the treatment of pornography addiction. Pornography severely impacts the addict's inner-self, interfering with the formation and maintenance of healthy self-esteem and self-image. Oftentimes, shame accompanies compulsive pornography use, deterring people from seeking treatment for pornography addiction. More often than not, pornography addicts fear disclosing their struggles, keeping their addiction a secret. In comparison to other addictions that have evident impacts, pornography addiction is easier to keep secret, resulting in a lack of accountability and continued behavior.

¹⁸ Sawyer et al., "Is Shame a Barrier to Sobriety? A Narrative Analysis of those in Recovery," *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy* 27, no. 1 (2020): 79.

¹⁹ Sawyer et al., "Is Shame a Barrier to Sobriety," 80.

Since shame results in isolation, negative self-evaluation, and a sense of inferiority, treatment of pornography addiction will help addicts reclaim their integrity, morality, and sense of worth. This research will help clergy working with pornography addicts to possess the tools required for non-shame approaches for treatment. Overcoming the shame of addiction to pornography involves developing a self-image that is found in the pride of one's self, the promotion of effective work, and the positive occupation of one's time and energy. Overcoming shame results in the elimination of guilt, disgrace, and defeat.²⁰

Importance of the Problem to Academia

Pornography addiction is the continued engagement in using pornographic paraphernalia for sexual gratification, despite negative consequences and loss of control over the user's own life, relationships, and day-to-day activities.²¹ The problem is very important to academia as it sets a foundation for research that contributes to the existing therapeutic processes for the treatment of pornography addiction with a much-needed component. Shame is a universal emotion that can have extremely negative impacts when left unregulated. The meticulous examination of the resilience overcoming the shame of addiction to pornography has an important scientific undertaking that is crucial to a healthy body, a sound mind, and a revitalized spirit. Academia will benefit from this research as it will gain access to treatment modalities that delve into root causes of a serious problem.

²⁰ Sawyer et al., "Is Shame a Barrier to Sobriety," 79.

²¹ Skinner, *Treating Pornography Addiction*, 22.

CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION AND SHAME

The goal of this research is to explore (a) the impacts of shame on the persistence of the use of pornography for sexual gratification, (b) the need for the concealment of the behavior and on the avoidance of the participation in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, and (c) on the intensification of the use of pornography within Coptic Orthodox Church communities. One of this chapter's chief objectives is to investigate the problematic outcomes of pornography addiction and the negative impressions of the emotion of shame. This research suggests that the management of shame is an integral component for recovery from pornography addiction. Therefore, this research will focus on resolving sin, evaluating shame, managing addictive behavior, and developing a plan for repentance through confession of sin and incremental change through self-discipline.

This chapter will examine the biblical narrative of King David, his sexual addiction, his struggle with shame, his confrontation by Nathan the prophet, his confession of sin, and his repentance. The biblical story of King David is a great example of God's love for humanity. King David, who was referred to as a man after God's own heart, suffered from the disease of addiction, believing that as king he was permitted to behave in whichever way he desired without consequences. This chapter will highlight David's rape of Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite. Ashamed of his sins, David hid his crimes and went to extreme length to conceal his sins. Out of his beneficence and justice, God sent Nathan the prophet to confront David and inform him of the consequences of his actions. The price of David's sin of rape, murder, and deception was severe. He spent the rest of his life in sorrow, regretting the injustices he had done. Psalm 50 is a powerful expression of David's mental torment, regret, and shame,

however, at the same time, it is a powerful expression of David's hope in God's mercy and restoration.

Difference between Shame and Guilt

Before delving into the biblical narrative of King David, the delineation of key terms and the differentiation between key concepts are necessary. An accurate differentiation between the emotions of shame and guilt is highly critical for the prevention of addiction, mental disorders, and dysfunctional behaviors. A proper distinction between the two emotions allows for the proper interventions needed to address their impacts. Individuals who deal correctly with these emotions are able to accurately self-assess, applying helpful coping mechanism and preventing possible complications. From a theological standpoint, both shame and guilt are byproducts of sin or the violation of the of God's law.²² Primarily, both shame and guilt are self-conscious emotions that involve self-reflection, self-criticism, and self-evaluation, encompassing negative feelings of distress caused by an individual's perceived setbacks, failures, or wrongdoings.²³ They are often addressed as a single construct, however, from a psychological perspective, there are significant differences between the two emotions.

The emotion of guilt is a situation-specific sense of remorse for a misdeed committed in error, while the emotion of shame is a universal designation in which individuals find fault in themselves, steering them to problematic self-loathing.²⁴ Guilt is an emotion caused by moral transgressions, involving wrongful behaviors for which individuals are held responsible. On the

²² Mary Vandenberg, "Shame, Guilt, and the Practice of Repentance: An Intersection of Modern Psychology with the Wisdom of Calvin," *Christian Scholar's Review* 50, no. 3 (2021): 300.

²³ Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi, "Reconsidering the Difference Between Shame and Guilt," *Europe's Journal of Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2017): 710.

²⁴ Lesley DiFrancisco, "Distinguishing Emotions of Guilt and Shame in Psalm 51," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 50, no. 4 (2018): 180.

other hand, shame involves flaws attributed to character, incompetence, or physical inadequacies for which individuals are not held responsible. Guilt directs empathy towards the person who was wronged, whereas shame only focuses on oneself. When it comes to guilt, people condemn their behavior, however, when it comes to shame, people condemn themselves. As a consequence, shame results in emotions that contribute to the development of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and negative self-evaluation.²⁵

Research suggests that guilt has been found to reconstruct behavioral tendencies, stimulating reparative actions such as seeking support, apologizing, amending, and undoing. Contrarily, shame inhibits individuals from pursuing corrective measures, promoting withdrawal, escape behaviors, and hostile self-defensive reactions.²⁶ Snoek et al. insinuate that oftentimes guilt-prone individuals will resist and terminate their maladaptive patterns of behavior, making amends for past wrongdoings, whereas shame-prone individuals will continue their maladaptive patterns of behavior regardless of their consequences, avoiding responsibility for past wrongdoings.²⁷ Consequently, the emotion of shame obstructs the treatment process for addiction, keeping the behavior secretive, hindering change, furthering deception, and intensifying entrapment. Regarding the deleterious impacts of shame, Sawyer et al. purport:

Shame increases vulnerability to developing an addictive behavior. Evidence also suggests that those who experience shame may experience anger and depression, in particular self-directed aggression, which can present as the dangerous use of substances. This may impact negatively on recovery.²⁸

²⁵ Mary Vandenberg, "Shame, Guilt, and the Practice of Repentance," 300.

²⁶ Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi, "Reconsidering the Difference," 714.

²⁷ Snoek et al., "Managing Shame and Guilt in Addiction: A Pathway to Recovery," *Journal of Addictive Behaviors* 120 (2021): 1.

²⁸ Sawyer et al., "Is Shame a Barrier to Sobriety? A Narrative Analysis of those in Recovery," *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy* 27, no. 1 (2020): 79.

Guilt: A Condemnation of Behavior

Guilt is a moral emotion that plays a significant role in fostering moral behavior.²⁹ It is an emotion felt within specific circumstances that involves cognition. It impacts a person's sense of morality toward a specific action that is appraised as sinful. Ferguson, Eyre, and Ashbaker postulate, "A major elicitor of guilt is the perception that one's acts of omission or commission are morally wrong by virtue of bringing disadvantage to a human or nonhuman entity."³⁰ Guilt is temporary and situation specific, relating to feelings of remorse for an action that is connected to negative consequences.³¹ Guilt has the potential to function as a positive emotion, guiding self-evaluation and behavioral decisions. It has a specific focus, possessing elements for renewal and transformation, leading wrongdoers towards sensible patterns of thinking and healthy behavior. In summation, guilt can be good, fostering positive moral decisions and positive social implications.³² Ultimately, guilt can be viewed from a positive standpoint, possibly functioning as a stimulus yielding innovations and an impetus for change.

Shame: A Condemnation of Self

Shame has plagued humanity from the time Adam and Eve unrestrainedly bit into the forbidden fruit, experiencing shame in their nakedness (Gen. 2:4-3:24). Their initial instinct led them to hide from each other and from God, suffering shame as a result of sin (Gen. 3:7-11). Shame is a negative self-conscious emotion, arising when individuals are overly concerned of

²⁹ VandenBerg, "Shame, Guilt, and the Practice of Repentance," 298.

³⁰ Tamara Ferguson, Heidi Eyre, and Michel Ashbaker, "Unwanted Identities: A Key Variable in Shame—Anger Links and Gender Differences in Shame," *Sex Roles* 42, no. 3-4 (2000): 150.

³¹ Lesley DiFransico, "Distinguishing Emotions of Guilt and Shame in Psalm 51," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 50, no. 4 (2018): 182.

³² DiFransico, "Distinguishing Emotions of Guilt and Shame," 182.

other people's opinions and views of them. George Fletcher writes, "The core experience of shame is feeling exposed, subject to the gaze of another. The response to shame, as to nakedness, is to avoid the gaze."³³ Adam and Eve's disobedience to God's commandment resulted in the corruption of their untarnished nature, damaging their godly image, corrupting their faultless attributes, defiling their lofty inclinations, and exposing their vulnerability to future demonic attacks. Paul writes extensively about God's righteous judgment and the rejection of those who flagrantly disobey God's sacred commandments. Paul reiterates, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Following the ruinous footsteps of their ancestors, humankind possess the same instinct to hide themselves, often experiencing shame due to their proclivity of concealing their sin. One of the consequences of sin is moral failure, developing a pattern of irreverent futility. Sinful pride leads to shame of one's moral failures, deficiencies, and fragilities, resulting in a tendency to spend an extensive amount of time and exert a great deal of effort to hide from the scrutiny of others. Curt Thompson writes, "Shame leads us to cloak ourselves with invisibility to prevent further intensification of the emotion."³⁴ Shame caused by sin wields great power over humanity, dominating valuable qualities of life designed for the glory of God and consuming precious time and energy in avoiding exposure.

Shame habitually drives its victims to hide in all the wrong places, immersing themselves in dysfunctional behaviors that intensify the damage and worsen the isolation. Shame is not solely a consequence of Adam and Eve's disregard to God's firm commandment; it is the emotional weapon Satan utilizes to degrade humankind's relationship with God and destabilize

³³ George Fletcher, "Punishment, Guilt, and Shame in Biblical Thought," *Faculty Publications at Scholarship Archive* 343 (2004): 355-356.

³⁴ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 29.

their fellowship with others.³⁵ Shame is a leading tactic for the prevention of taking part in the grace and gifts God gave to humanity. Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi postulate that Withdrawal is among the action tendencies shame produces.³⁶ These God-given gifts enable the community of Jesus Christ to become light-bearing, fostering an empowering environment that liberates the ensnared, strengthens the weakened, and uplifts the fallen. Due to a combination of humanity's fallen nature and moral failure, people do not always behave as they know they should, intensifying the emotion of shame.

Biblical and Theological Reflection on Sin, Shame, and Addiction

The concept of sin in Christian theology deals with the viewpoints of missing the mark, violating a boundary, and rebelling against God. The Bible uses many terms to describe sin, such as ignorance, error, inattention, irreligion, transgression, iniquity, lack of integrity, treachery, perversion, and abomination.³⁷ Sin is a barrier between God and people, separating them from their divine creator. Herman Bavinck postulates, "In humans every sin is a turning away from God, disobedience, rebellion, anarchy, lawlessness, and at the same time, since sin is never self-sufficient, a turning toward a creature, idolatry, pride, self-seeking, sensuality."³⁸ Sin is described as a rebellion against the sovereignty of God, finding its way into humanity's soul through the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3). Sin is an existential problem, resulting in the estrangement from God and the deviation from his principles.

³⁵ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 13.

³⁶ Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi, "Reconsidering the Difference," 715.

³⁷ Milliard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 517-523.

³⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 152.

The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines sin as a rebellion against God.³⁹ Sin is to miss his purpose of one's own life, surrendering to the power of evil rather than God. Sin is a universal problem, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, New International Version). Old Testament Scripture views sin as a breach of the covenant God had made with the nation of Israel (Exod. 19; 24; Josh. 24). It's perceived as a transgression of the statutes of God and a boundary violation of God's standard of righteousness (Prov. 6:16-17). Deuteronomy 6:25 states, "And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."

Sin and Its Impacts on Human Functioning

Sin has very serious consequences. bringing chaos, confusion, and disorder into the lives of those who fall victim to it. Sin's consequences are far-reaching and long-lasting, severing humanity's relationship with God, causing spiritual death, promoting moral decay, producing divine disfavor, and fracturing social relationships. Sin leads to shame, and in turn, shame leads to addiction. Sin possesses an enslaving power, leading to diverse addictions and maladaptive habitual behaviors. Milliard Erickson argues, "Some of the results of sin might be termed natural consequences, that is, they follow from the sin in virtually an automatic cause-and-effect sequence."⁴⁰ Ultimately, one sin leads to another sin, which in turn leads to addiction followed by shame.

Consequentially, sin diverts God's people from pursuing a path which leads to the true source of life, misguiding them towards false promises and ungodly conformities. The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary defines sin as, "Anything in the creature which does not

³⁹ Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1505.

⁴⁰ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 549.

express, or which is contrary to, the holy character of the Creator.”⁴¹ Sin is any offense against God that violates God’s principles and rules. It is any deliberate violation of God’s law through word, desire, action, or inaction.⁴² Sin is a turning away from God, breaking the bond between God and people. Isaiah writes, “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear” (59:2).⁴³ As sin inches into human hearts, humanity’s longing for a committed life to God gradually dissipates.

Sexual Sin

Christians consistently battle sexual temptations, combating fleshly desires that war against the soul. Uncontrolled desire driven by passion leads to sin, ensnaring both the spirit and the flesh. Solomon writes, “Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng” (Prov. 7:26). While striving to avoid falling into diverse sin patterns and failing to do what is pleasing to God’s statutes, shame worsens the hurt, leading to compulsivity and addiction.⁴⁴ Shame leads to isolation, despair, and brokenness, promoting the continuation of the concealment of the behavior. Shame discourages people from confessing their sins, convincing them that hiding is the best option to protect their reputation, maintain their relationships, and uphold their statuses.

New Testament Scripture copiously addresses sexual temptation and strongly warns against conceding to the lusts of the flesh.⁴⁵ Paul emphasizes, “For the flesh desires what is

⁴¹ Merrill Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), 796.

⁴² Peter Addai-Mensah, “A Theological Reflection on the Concept of Sin in Christianity,” *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2020): 106.

⁴⁴ Tim Clinton and Ron Hawkins, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling: 40 Topics, Spiritual Insights & Easy-to-Use Action Steps* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 75.

⁴⁵ Luke Istafanous and Marguerite Rizk, *Purity: An Orthodox Christian Curriculum* (Bellville: Orthodox Press, 2017), 108.

contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want” (Gal. 5:17). Physical desires are an integral component of the fabric of humanity, however, when left unchecked, result in deleterious consequences.⁴⁶

Pornography

Pornography is a sexual sin, a form of sexual immorality, which defiles humanity’s godly image. It is any illustration or depiction of nudity, sexual behavior or sexual activity designed to entertain or sexually arouse, specifically for the purpose of engaging in sexual activity, either with a partner or by masturbation.⁴⁷ Pornography is used to enhance sexual fantasies and ignite the imagination to help an individual masturbate and experience an orgasm. Pornography defiles the mind, ensnaring the heart through the eyes. Jesus purports, “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light” (Matt. 6:22). From a Biblical and theological standpoint, pornography has severe spiritual ramifications, damaging one’s relationship with God.

Addiction

Compulsive sin leads to addiction, which is the gratification of the flesh and the indulgence of the temporal pleasures that come with the element of attraction. Gerald May posits, “Addiction is a self-defeating force that abuses our freedom and makes us do things we really do not want to do.”⁴⁸ Addiction binds human desire, which leads to preoccupations and

⁴⁶ Tim Clinton and Eric Scalise, *The Quick-Reference Guide to Addictions and Recovery Counseling: 40 Topics, Spiritual Insights & Easy-to-Use Action Steps* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 25.

⁴⁷ D’Onte Carroll, *Saved, Sanctified, and Addicted to Porn: Overcoming Sexual Perversion* (Accokeek: Kingdom Living Publishing, 2017), 11.

⁴⁸ Gerald May, *Addiction & Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (New York: Harper One, 1988), 3.

obsessions, causing people to live lives full of emotional and mental battles. The same processes that are responsible for chemical addictions are also responsible for behavioral addictions.⁴⁹

Addiction is characterized by the continued involvement in a behavior or action regardless of its negative consequences, resulting in loss of control and compulsivity.⁵⁰ Robert Cox proposes, “Even a sex addict can lose everything he has worked to gain because he will spend time and money to feed his growing problem.”⁵¹ Human desire is wilyly captured, the mind is deceitfully ensnared, and the heart is venomously polluted. James postulates, “After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (1:15).

Addiction, in its various forms, is a self-defeating force that deprives humans of their freedom, causing them to do things they do not want to do.⁵² In his epistle to the Romans, Paul underscores the idea that sin propels people to do things they do not want to do:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it (Rom. 7:15-20).

Those who struggle with addiction are enslaved with chains of their own making that erode free will, breed disobedience, and dissipate human dignity. Jung Yeon Shim argues that addicts worship addictive materials and behaviors as their gods, and are in need of repentance to achieve

⁴⁹ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 3.

⁵⁰ Michael Ascher and Petros Levounis, *The Behavioral Addictions* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2015), xi.

⁵¹ Robert Cox, *A Man with a Dilemma* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2007), 55.

⁵² May, *Addiction & Grace*, 3.

restoration.⁵³ From a Biblical viewpoint, addiction is equated to idolatry, forcing its captives to worship the objects of their desire and preventing them from faithfully loving God and others.⁵⁴

Sexual Addiction

Sexual addiction, also known as hypersexual disorder, hyper-sexuality, or sexual compulsivity, is a behavioral addiction focused on sexual relations, sexual urges, and sexual fantasy.⁵⁵ Similar to other addictive behaviors, sex addicts abuse both behavior and fantasy as means of escape from negative emotions, such as shame, depression, or hopelessness.⁵⁶ David Whitehead writes, “Sex addicts are hooked on the dissociative euphoria produced by intense sexual fantasies and directly related patterns of sexual behavior (including their “endless” search for sex).”⁵⁷ Sex addicts exhibit patterns of problematic fantasy-driven behavior, such as compulsive use of pornography, consistent involvement in sexual affairs, continual engagement in sexual behavior without regard to immediate or long-term negative consequences, or participation in sexual offences, such as rape, voyeurism, exhibitionism, or frotteurism.⁵⁸

In addition to its problematic psychological, physical, and social impacts, sexual addiction has serious spiritual ramifications, damaging one’s relationship with God.⁵⁹ In his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul urges Christians to flee from sexual immorality, pursue a life

⁵³ Jung Yeon Shim, “The Study of a Christian 12-Step Program from a Christian Smartphone-Addicted Adolescents: A Biblical Perspective,” *Journal of Religion and Health*, 60 (2021): 1784.

⁵⁴ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 4.

⁵⁵ David Whitehead, *Sex, Porn and Masturbation Addiction Mastery: A Comprehensive Practical Guide to Re-focusing your Sexual Energy, Identifying, Solving and Recovering from Sexual Love Addictions* (Middletown: Silk Publishing, 2021), 1.

⁵⁶ Whitehead, *Sex, Porn and Masturbation Addiction Mastery*, 2.

⁵⁷ Whitehead, *Sex, Porn and Masturbation Addiction Mastery*, 2.

⁵⁸ Whitehead, *Sex, Porn and Masturbation Addiction Mastery*, 4-5.

⁵⁹ Carroll, *Saved, Sanctified, and Addicted to Porn*, 23.

of holiness, and discipline their bodies against the lusts of the flesh (4:3-4). Paul admonishes believers to have self-restraint, resisting against sin to the point of bloodshed (Heb. 12:4). Scripture provides a plethora of examples of flawed individuals encumbered by shame, powerfully detailing their struggle with sin, compulsivity, and addiction. The perilous outcomes of shame are eloquently described in the life of King David. The Biblical story of David produces a riveting depiction of how God's forgiveness, grace, and restoration transform a shamed sexually addicted powermonger into a man after God's own heart.

King David: A Man after God's Own Heart

King David is an iconic Old Testament hero who becomes God's choice to replace Saul as king of Israel, becoming highly esteemed after killing the giant Goliath with a sling stone (1 Sam. 17). He became Israel's most enigmatic monarch, building a great empire, winning many wars, and defeating many powerful kings. Before his fame spread throughout the region, David was an unassuming young shepherd who rose from obscurity to prominence and was anointed by God to lead the nation (1 Sam. 16). The narrator reports, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel'" (2 Sam. 7:8). God chose David to shepherd God's people and to guide them to devotedly adhere to his law. In spite of his flagrant flaws and scandalous debaucheries, David is described as a man after the Lord's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), God's chosen one (1 Sam. 18:14), and God's cherished son (2 Sam. 7:14-15). David's unwavering devotion and undeviating loyalty to God as Israel's supreme ruler earned him a reputation against which all Israel's future kings would be measured. Nevertheless, covetousness connivingly crept into David's heart, leading to a cascade of appalling events.

David's Emotional Struggles

Researchers suggest that it is possible that intense emotions of shame caused David to suffer from major depression, having a distressed soul (Ps. 31:8), an agonized heart (Ps. 33:3), and a troubled spirit (25:17).⁶⁰ Liubov Ben-Noun theorizes that David meets the criteria for Major Depression Disorder, which is characterized by severe depressed mood (Ps. 6:7), loss of interest or pleasure in normal activities (2 Sam. 11:1), change in previous levels of functioning lasting more than two weeks (Ps. 38:14), changes in appetite (2 Sam. 12:16), insomnia (Ps. 6:6), fatigue or loss of energy (Ps. 31:11), feelings of worthlessness (Ps. 22:7; 31:13), and recurrent thoughts of death or suicide (Ps.22:16; 55:5; 18:5-6).⁶¹

David's Sexual Addiction

Scripture reports that David had at least seven primary wives and many more secondary wives before the rape of Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite (1 Chron. 3:1-9; 2 Sam. 5:13; 2 Sam. 16:22; 2 Sam. 19:5). A secondary wife is a concubine, who is a wife of lower status, generally a slave or a prisoner of war.⁶² Primary and secondary wives of kings, chiefs, and wealthy men were symbols of their power, political connections, and virility. Although Jewish law forbade kings from marrying many wives (Deut. 17:17) yet David violates God's commandment, allowing his heart to be led astray. David was sexually active with his wives (2 Sam. 13; 1 Chron. 3:9; 1 Chron. 13:1-9) and Scripture records that his wives bore him at least 19 sons and one daughter (1 Chron. 3; 2 Sam. 3:4; 1 Kings 1; 1 Kings 2:13-25). Despite having

⁶⁰ Liubov Ben-Noun, "Mental Disorder that Afflicted King David the Great," *History of Psychology* 15, no. 4 (2004): 1.

⁶¹ Ben-Noun, "Mental Disorder," 3.

⁶² Merrill Tenney, *Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1967), 181.

access to many wives, being driven by compulsive sexual urges, David rapes Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah.

David Rapes Bathsheba

During the spring season, when kings went out to battle, David remained in Jerusalem while his army was at war (2 Sam. 11:1). Unoccupied and distressed by idleness, he arose from his bed and went up to the rooftop of his mansion (2 Sam. 11:2). There he saw Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, washing herself as required for women by Jewish purification laws (2 Sam. 11:2; Lev. 15:19-21). Uriah was a noble Israelite of Hittite ancestry, the weapon bearer of the army commander, and one of David's elite warriors.⁶³ Bathsheba was a chaste and beautiful woman, who was waiting patiently for the safe return of her husband from battle (2 Sam. 11:2-4). Burning with lust for her, David sends his men to usher Bathsheba to the king's palace, summons her to his royal chambers, and rapes her (2 Sam. 11:4). Frederick Gaiser writes, "From his rooftop, his place of privilege, David was, he thought, master of all he surveyed. So, David simply took what he wanted"⁶⁴ King David neglects his duty to protect his people by not joining his army on the battleground, sleeps at home, remains idle, and rapes another man's wife for his own sexual gratification. Robert Cox purports, "His wife and children become strangers while his job and responsibilities at home are unimportant."⁶⁵

⁶³ Brand et al. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1642.

⁶⁴ Frederick Gaiser, "The David of Psalm 51: Reading Psalm 51 in Light of Psalm 50," *Word & World* 23, no. 4 (2003): 383.

⁶⁵ Robert Cox, *A Man with a Dilemma*, 55.

A Sexually Addicted Powermonger

The abruptness of the events conveys no indications of affection, love, or care, underscoring David's apathy, crudeness, and selfishness.⁶⁶ Yitzhak Berger writes, "The central flaw that emerges from David's conduct in ch.11 is his lack of empathy, borne of the distance between himself and his subjects."⁶⁷ David did not care for Bathsheba, considering her as another object to possess. Progressively, the gaze led to fantasy, fantasy to desire, desire to fixation, fixation to pursuit, and pursuit to action. The enormous power differential placed Bathsheba in a perilous situation, believing that resistance to the king would endanger her life and the lives of her husband and family.⁶⁸

Upon seeing Bathsheba, David was aroused by her beauty and strongly desired her sexually.⁶⁹ Jan P. Fokkelman insinuates that the narrator's description of the incident suggests a sudden moral brutality, reducing Bathsheba to a mere object of desire.⁷⁰ The Biblical narrative suggests that David sexually coerced Bathsheba, degrading her to an object to satisfy his sexual cravings.⁷¹ David's sexual encounter with Bathsheba is similar to a sexual encounter between an

⁶⁶ Jennifer Andruska, "Rape in the Syntax of 2 Samuel 11:4," *ZAW De Gruyter* 129, no. 1 (2017): 105.

⁶⁷ Yitzhak Berger, "Ruth and the David – Bathsheba Story: Allusions and Contrasts," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33.4 (2009): 437.

⁶⁸ Andruska, "Rape in the Syntax of 2 Samuel 11:4," 104.

⁶⁹ Alexander Abasili, "Was it Rape? The David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-examined," *Vetus Testamentum* 61 (2011): 8.

⁷⁰ Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume 1: King David (11 Sam 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2)* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 52.

⁷¹ Moshe Garsiel, "The Story of David and Bathsheba: A Different Approach," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (1993): 255.

adult and a minor, abusing his power and authority to bring her into his home, force himself on her, and rape her.⁷²

David Murders Uriah

When David is informed that Bathsheba is married to Uriah, he is challenged by a chief moral principle: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Exod. 20:17). Alexander Abasili writes, “The information about Bathsheba’s marital status serves as an implicit warning to the king regarding the identity of the beautiful woman who lives next door to him”⁷³ Regardless of his knowledge of her marital status and in spite of his prestige as king, David proceeds to summon her to his chambers and engages in sexual intercourse with her. Upon learning that she had become pregnant as a result of his offense and abuse of power, David summons Uriah from the battleground to manipulate him into returning home to have sex with his wife. Uriah declines David’s persuasions, refusing to betray his loyalty to the troops who are fighting on the frontlines. Uriah says to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife?” (2 Sam. 11:11). Moshe Garsiel suggests that Uriah became aware of David’s affair with Bathsheba, implicitly accusing him of committing adultery with the wife of one of his loyal soldiers fighting the enemy on the frontlines.⁷⁴ Yitzhak Berger writes, “The dedicated soldier’s memorable speech condemns the king for his self-

⁷² Richard Davidson, “Did David Rape Bathsheba? A Case Study in Narrative Theology,” *Journal of Adventist Theological Society* 17 (2006): 89.

⁷³ Abasili, “Was it Rape? The David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-examined,” 8.

⁷⁴ Garsiel, “The Story of David and Bathsheba,” 255.

serving conduct.”⁷⁵ As a consequence, David mercilessly orders the brutal murder of Uriah, illustrating his ruthlessness, narcissism, and depravity.

David is Condemned for His Perpetrations

God saw David’s perpetrations as repugnant, commissioning the prophet Nathan to confront the king and condemn him for his crimes (2 Sam. 12). The narrator writes, “And the thing which David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord” (2 Sam. 11:27). God sends Nathan with a prophetic condemnation regarding his abuse of power, presenting the king with a judicial parable through which David condemns himself (2 Sam. 12:1-7). Upon hearing Nathan’s parable, David quickly utters the verdict: “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die” (2 Sam. 12:5). During his interaction with Nathan, David conveys his knowledge of the law, expresses his indignation for injustice, emphasizes his duty as the upholder of the law, and communicates his intention to execute the law forcefully on the perpetrator.

Confession, Repentance, and Forgiveness of Sin

In the story of David, an essential element of his humility and brokenness is his willingness to confess his sins and offer a sincere repentance. Confession is an integral component of religious life, holding a prominent place in the lives of Christians and followers of various religions.⁷⁶ Researchers emphasize that confession of sin is unequivocally associated with psychological well-being and should be considered in psychological research and diagnosis.⁷⁷ Sharon Hymer posits, “Religious confession not only reflects meaning; it also

⁷⁵ Berger, “Ruth and the David – Bathsheba Story,” 451.

⁷⁶ Sharon Hymer, “Therapeutic and Redemptive Aspects of Religious Confession,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 34, no. 1 (1995): 41.

⁷⁷ Rana et al., “Religious Confession and Symptom Severity: A Prospective Comparative Study,” *Journal of Religious Health* 54 (2015): 2142.

creates meaning filtered through our psychosocial understanding of what constitutes sin.”⁷⁸

Furthermore, researchers report several identified functions of confession, such as reduction of shame and guilt, increased social connectivity, elevation of awareness of purpose, impression management, and improvement of spiritual functions.⁷⁹ D’onte Carroll, Sr., a recovering sex addict, powerfully recounts the detriment of his pornography addiction:

My problem was I had no one to talk to, no one I could confide in and be my raw self about my struggle so that they could help me before I got to a posture where I was dragging an addiction as such into my marriage. For years, I wanted to go to some type of rehabilitation center, but then I figured people would question my whereabouts an interrogate me and I did not want that. I was known to be a young preacher, quiet and into God, a good boy. Therefore, I did not want to ruin people’s good views of me and risk trashing my character because the world knows a flaw about me.⁸⁰

Religious confession, characterized by confidentiality, offers a medium for expression of individual identity and social necessities.⁸¹ Mark Laaser underscores that confession in the Catholic and Orthodox churches provides opportunities for people to unburden themselves of their sins by confiding in a priest.⁸² Laaser strongly suggests that Protestant churches ought to provide regular means for people to confess their sins to a pastor.⁸³ Through religious confession, confessors are empowered, realizing that they are no longer isolated by the shame of sin. Confession of sin is an agent for reconciliation, recommitting sinners to God and to the community of the faithful. Confession bridges the gap, making God accessible to those who

⁷⁸ Hymer, “Therapeutic and Redemptive Aspects,” 41.

⁷⁹ Murray-Swank et al., “Understanding Spiritual Confession: A Review and Theoretical Synthesis,” *Journal of Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 10, no. 3 (2007): 275.

⁸⁰ Carroll, *Saved, Sanctified, and Addicted to Porn*, 57.

⁸¹ Hymer, “Therapeutic and Redemptive Aspects,” 42.

⁸² Mark Laaser, *The 7 Principles of Highly Accountable Men*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), 17.

⁸³ Laaser, *The 7 Principles of Highly Accountable Men*, 18.

repent. Sharon Hymer purports that people's relationship with God is primarily one of intimacy in which they are required to give themselves over to God in confession and prayer.⁸⁴ As a result, God becomes a direct part of their lives. Confession helps repentant sinners overcome estrangement, as they expose their secrets, becoming free from the deleterious impacts of shame. It provides a means for progress and transformation, promoting an atmosphere for the involvement in substantially meaningful encounters in which individuals and groups are welcomed and uninhibited to contribute to the directions of change.⁸⁵

The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession in the Coptic Orthodox Church

The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is one of the seven sacraments of the Coptic Orthodox Church and is recognized as one of the four redemptive sacraments.⁸⁶ The Coptic Orthodox Church defines repentance as the conversion of one's heart, the transformation of one's mind, and the reformation of one's soul. It involves leaving behind past sins, focusing on a renewed life with God, and lifting up one's senses from the mire of sin to the magnificence of heaven. Repentance is to forsake sin and to submit one's self to the ordinances of God. It is the pursuit for self-reconstruction, guided by one's faith in the grace and mercy of God.

The Coptic Orthodox Church perceives the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession as an extension of the Sacrament of Baptism, as one's soul is reborn and reunited with God.⁸⁷ It is the process of casting away one's old nature that is tarnished by sin and embracing a new one

⁸⁴ Hymer, "Therapeutic and Redemptive Aspects," 42.

⁸⁵ Arnold Kurtz, "The Pastor as a Manager of Conflict in the Church." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 20, no. 2 (1982): 114.

⁸⁶ Athanasios Al-Makari, *The Historical Rite of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession* (Cairo: Dar Nobar, 2007), 18.

⁸⁷ Al-Makari, *The Historical Rite*, 18.

that is cleansed by the blood of Christ. Repentance requires spiritual formation and personal maturation, being firmly connected to the disciplines of praying, fasting, and reading the Bible. Repentance is an encounter with God who does not desire the death of sinners but rather that they repent and live (Ezek. 18:23). Jesus declares, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37). Regarding the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky writes:

The Mystery of Repentance is called a spiritual medicine. A man’s sins – which draw him downward; which dull his mind, heart, and conscience; which blind his spiritual gaze; which make powerless his Christian will – are annihilated, and his living bond with the Church and with the Lord God is restored. Being relieved of the burden of sins, he again comes to life spiritually and is able to strengthen himself and become perfected in the good Christian path.⁸⁸

The Coptic Orthodox Church teaches that confession is an individual’s recognition of sin, offered by a repentant sinner to God, through the absolution of a priest.⁸⁹ Fundamentally, confession of sin is acknowledgment, admission, and declaration of one’s own transgression or wrongdoing. Several Biblical passages underscore the significance of the confession of sin in relation to forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration (Lev. 5:5; Josh. 7:19; 2 Sam. 12:13; Ps. 32:5; Ps. 51; Prov. 28:13; Matt. 3:6; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9). In his first epistle, John writes, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9). James teaches his readers that through prayer and confession of sins they can attain healing (5:16). Confession of sin is an integral component of self-examination built upon the foundation of Biblical truths.

⁸⁸ Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2009), 291.

⁸⁹ Al-Makari, *The Historical Rite*, 18.

David's Moral Failure

The Biblical narrative of David's moral failure indicates that the consequences of his sins of rape, murder, betrayal, concealment, and abuse of power were severe, as his life and legacy were tarnished by his appalling actions. David satisfaction of his sexual cravings for Bathsheba marks a turning point in the Davidic personality and kingship.⁹⁰ David abuses his power as king, indulges in lustfulness, covets another man's wife, victimizes a married woman, makes several attempts to conceal his sexual misconduct, and murders a loyal patriot to preserve his own reputation. Diana Garland and David Garland write, "David was king; he had covenantal reasonability for the well-being of his people, including and perhaps especially Bathsheba, since her husband was off fighting David's war."⁹¹ David cunningly plots the murder of Uriah, instigating the death of many of his own loyal soldiers and causing a crucial military setback (2 Sam. 11:17). After hearing of the success of his scheme, David offers no consolation to the mourning widow. He delays until the end of the mourning period, then sends messengers to bring her to his home, the place where she will give birth to her ill-fated child (2 Sam. 11:26-27).

Psalm 51: David's Confession and Repentance

At this point, David had been covering his sins for a period of nine months. God sent Nathan with the difficult task of confronting the king about his crimes (2 Sam. 12). Once David was reprovved for his transgressions, he did not deny his wrongdoings, offering repentance for his sins. Jacqueline Grey writes, "Although the damaging consequences of his abusive behavior were still to be outworked in the subsequent narrative, David did not blame his victims or

⁹⁰ Abasili. "Was it Rape? The David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-examined," 9.

⁹¹ Diana Garland and David Garland, "Bathsheba's Story: Surviving Abuse and Loss," *Family and Community Ministries Baylor University School of Social Work* (2007): 24.

attempt to justify his behavior.”⁹² Convicted by the prophetic verdict, David confesses his sins, offers repentance, and accepts the consequences of his actions (2 Sam. 12:13-23).

When Nathan confronts David for his appalling moral turpitudes, David confesses his sins and does not hide his transgressions. Psalm 51, one of the penitential psalms, conveys David’s intense emotions of personal shame and guilt for his grotesque moral violations.⁹³ Psalm 51 is an individual heartfelt confession, focusing on David’s repentance after Nathan exposes his transgressions against Uriah and Bathsheba.⁹⁴ It clearly illustrates the king’s confession, repentance, and acceptance of God’s judgment. The psalmist petitions God for cleansing (7), restoration (12), and deliverance (14), exhibiting unparalleled elements of remorse, regret, and compunction within the Psalter.⁹⁵ David’s sins led to serious consequences, critically severing his relationship with God. David accepts blame and assumes culpability for his moral infringements, pleading with God for forgiveness and mercy. Ultimately, the psalm is presented as a plea for the restoration of a relationship broken by sin, in which David seeks redemption from God.

Psalm 51 is recognized as a personal lament, in which a remorseful king cries out for the mercy of God. David confesses his sins, exalting the Lord for his faithfulness, forgiveness, and restoration. The king is cognizant of his grievous transgression and acknowledges his immense need for God’s mercy and grace. David writes, “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Ps.

⁹² Jacqueline Grey, “A Prophetic Call to Repentance: David, Bathsheba and a Royal Abuse of Power,” *Pneuma* 41 (2019): 10.

⁹³ DiFransico, “Distinguishing Emotions of Guilt and Shame,” 180.

⁹⁴ Gaiser, “The David of Psalm 5,” 385.

⁹⁵ DiFransico, “Distinguishing Emotions of Guilt and Shame,” 183.

51:3-4). The psalm is a deeply fervid petition, providing many quintessential lessons regarding sin, shame, and forgiveness. It underscores that even a man after God's own heart can fall into terrible sin. It also emphasizes that no sin is greater than the incalculable mercy of God.

God's Forgiveness

David's journey provides a great deal of hope and optimism. Despite David's innumerable moral violations and sinful misdeeds, God was with him throughout the way. Much like David, people also struggle through their life's journey; but just as God was with David, he is also with his people. Before becoming king of Israel, David began his life as a simple shepherd, being prepared by God for the great responsibilities to come. God chose him to shepherd his people and to guide them to devotedly adhere to his law. Although David fortified the city of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:9) yet he failed to fortify the moral lives of his subjects.

The Book of Sirach, also known as the Wisdom of Sirach or the Book of Ecclesiasticus, which is included in the Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, provides more information about God's forgiveness and graciousness towards David. He writes, "The Lord took away his sins, and exalted his power forever; he gave a covenant of kingship and a glorious throne in Israel (Sir. 47:11, Good News Translation). According to Sirach, David worshipped God with all his heart, placing singers before the altar to praise God's holy name (Sir. 47:9-10). The Lord mercifully forgave David's sins, establishing an eternal covenant with him and his lineage. Sirach purports, "All the kings, except David, Hezekiah, and Josiah, were terrible sinners, because they abandoned the Law of God most-high to the very end of the kingdom" (Sir. 49:4). David humbles himself in the sight of God, seeking God's restoration, cleansing, and forgiveness.

Redemptive Grace, Mercy and Restoration

As was discussed previously, it is evident that King David strayed from the truth of what was required of him as the leader of God's nation. A man after God's own heart lost the innocence of the courageous warrior who killed a lion to protect his sheep and the faith of a fearless leader who took down a giant to defend a nation (1 Sam.17). Although God anointed David with power and blessing yet David grew in pride and selfish ambition. Instead of maturing as the spiritual leader of the nation, David was overrun by his sinful nature, submitting to the cravings of his heart. Yet God never gives up on David, allowing him the opportunities to truly repent from his sins and transform his life.

The term redemption is defined as the purchase of a slave for freedom.⁹⁶ According to New Testament theology, God granted humanity deliverance from sin through the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Paul writes, "Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14). Paul underscores that humanity was freely justified by grace through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24). Redemptive grace indicates that Jesus' blood is the price paid for humanity's liberation from the bondage of sin (1 Cor. 6:20; Gal. 3:13). Redemptive grace provides newness of life in Christ. Merrill Tenney underscores, "This new life is not merely a life gained by being released from sin, but one which exists only in continual relation with Christ."⁹⁷ The redemptive price Christ paid on the Cross and his atoning sacrifice are the means through which humanity receives forgiveness.

⁹⁶ Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, 708.

⁹⁷ Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, 708.

The image-bearing phenomena became corrupt, plummeting from grace to shame. Death mercilessly devastated the world, ravaging its victims and banishing them into the abyss. Lovingly, God planned to redeem his masterpiece, sending his only-begotten Son as a propitiation for sin. Jesus' demise on the Cross and his victory over death through his resurrection, restored humanity's hope in a renewed nature. The excruciating agony of the cross and the intensity of its pain are the substance of humanity's joyful triumph, being made accessible through Jesus' resurrection. Paul purports, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame" (Rom. 10:11). Paul copiously underscores that Jesus is the victorious Messiah through whom humanity is redeemed.⁹⁸ The children of God, who are adopted through the blood of Jesus Christ, are empowered by the Spirit to overcome sin, addiction, and shame. Paul underscores that God, through grace, has adopted humanity to be his children through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5-6).

A focus on sin without the possibility for redemption, mercy, and restoration promotes distress, hopelessness, and despair. Isaiah writes, "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool (1:18). Christianity teaches that there is no sin that surpasses the innumerable graces of God. All sins are redeemable and humanity is capable of transformation and renewal. Gerald May notes, "We are dependent upon grace for liberation from our addictions, but those very addictions impair our receptivity to grace."⁹⁹ God created humanity out of love, forming humans in his image and likeness to live eternally in his

⁹⁸ N.T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 38.

⁹⁹ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 18.

dissoluble embrace. Given free will and discernment to choose between good and evil, humanity sinned against God, tarnishing its flawless nature.

God's Restoration

In the same manner that God restored David's legacy as a man after God's own heart, God is continuously at work to restore each and every person to their destined glory. Research indicates that when people view moral failure as an opportunity for spiritual maturation, it increases the possibilities for innovative outcomes and improved decision-making capabilities.¹⁰⁰ Moral failures faced truthfully and courageously lead to more healthier and transformative outcomes than when suppressed and undisclosed.¹⁰¹ When undertaken with an outlook of hopefulness and an attitude of optimism, and when embraced with skills and tactfulness, moral failures lead to constructive outcomes. James writes, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (1:2-3). When people commit their lives to God, they are not too far from a life of victory. They gain victory over selfish desires and ambitions, over material matters and distractions, and over the traps and wiles of Satan. Those who overcome and are victorious are promised glorious things. Jesus faithfully promises, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments; and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels" (Rev. 3:5). Christ has prepared glorious blessings for those who strive and prevail.

¹⁰⁰ Deborah Hunsinger and Theresa Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict: Compassionate Leadership in Action* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2013), 2.

¹⁰¹ Jit et al., "Servant Leadership and Conflict Resolution: A Qualitative Study," *International Journal of Conflict Management* 27, no. 4 (2016): 594.

Satan consistently attempts to instill fear and despair in the hearts of God’s children. He persistently reminds them of their moral failures, shortcomings, and past sins. He actively and intentionally shames them and deceives them into thinking that God is not near them. He convinces them that their sins are too many and their brokenness is beyond repair. Curt Thompson powerfully writes,

Unfortunately, this invariably leads to the isolation of hiding from ourselves, from each other and from God, continuing to make up our stories on our own, terrified of collaborating in the telling of stories with others for fear that our nakedness will be revealed and exploited, the eventual, inevitable outcome of this isolation is hell, the antithetical state of the we-ness and with-ness of life in trinitarian community. It is the counter echo of God’s mandate that it is not good to be alone. Shame’s power lies in its subtlety and silence, embedded in mental functions of implicit memory that we carry individually and corporately, and is quite content to remain in the shadows while we go on to do its dirty work. It extends and nourishes itself, devouring us in the process, as our individual shame mushrooms into its various corporate expressions. We remain in its self-perpetuating cycle of judgment and hiding, continuing to fulfill the prophecy of the curses that God has foreseen.¹⁰²

Thankfully, there is no sin that surpasses the innumerable graces of God. N.T. Wright notes, “Grace perfects our complete nature not simply by topping it up but by judging it, condemning the evil which has infected it, and then renewing it.”¹⁰³ All sins are redeemable and humanity is capable of transformation and renewal.

Jesus is the Way Out of Shame

Shame is a painful negative self-conscious emotion that causes distress, depression, and humiliation. Shame leaves people broken, isolated, and repressed. Shame leads people to believe that they are no longer worthy of God’s love and approval. King David experienced these emotions and felt shame’s powerful grasp over his life. However, God sent the Nathan the

¹⁰² Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 113-114.

¹⁰³ Wright, *Paul*, 40.

prophet that David would no longer remain under the subjection of sin, shame, and addiction. Through God's immense love for his creation, he sent his only-begotten Son to redeem humanity and to restore his people to their former glory. Jesus became humanity's power over sin, victory over addiction, and way out of shame.

Jesus boldly refers to himself as the way (John 14:6). For those overburdened by sin, Jesus is the way out of moral failure, sin, and shame. Based on this declaration, early Christians proudly referred to themselves as the people of the Way. Christ is the way that brings his followers to the truth, leading them to eternal life. Jesus came to earth to uplift humanity to higher grounds, transporting them from the mire of the dunghill to the glorious mansions of his kingdom. All people are invited to advance in the way, to walk with God, and to pursue wholeness. Life with God is a distinctive lifestyle, pursued ideals, and renewed nature. Paul writes, "Walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph. 4:1). The journey upward is the ascension to higher grounds to meet with the Lord. The disciples witnessed the transfigured Christ only after journeying to the top of the mountain (Matt. 17:1–8, Mk. 9:2–8, Lk. 9:28–36). The glory of Christ was revealed to them after having walked with Him to higher grounds. The journey upward is a transformative journey from the mundane to the sublime, from the material to the metaphysical, and from the worldly to the heavenly.

Jesus Came for the Lost and Marginalized

The New Testament gospels emphasize God's care for the lost and outcast by evaluating Jesus' interactions with various types of people, and their response to his message.¹⁰⁴ God is committed to finding the lost, calling those in ministry to do the same. Jesus attracted sinners,

¹⁰⁴ Darrel Bock, *The Luke NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text ... To Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1996), 67.

while the Pharisees repelled them, because he truly cared for them without compromising his life-saving message. While the Pharisees arrogantly shamed the sinners, not realizing that they themselves were among the lost, Jesus understood their plight, provided for their needs, and sought to help them. The different characters in the New Testament gospels convey the degree to which people respond to Jesus, and the kinds of principles and priorities that may lead people to either accept or reject his call. The gospels expressively portray Jesus' inclusive approach, and his fervent desire to redeem the lost, embolden the oppressed, and restore the sinner. The magnificence of their depictions of Jesus possesses profound implications for humanity's relationship with God.

Jesus' teachings on sin and forgiveness impact humanity's understanding of its worth, purpose, and standard of living.¹⁰⁵ For example, Luke's Gospel clarifies the means in which Jesus' followers can serve God more diligently. Luke alludes that God's people do not always evade suffering, and may not always fit well in their societies, however, God's heart is saturated with love for his creation. The evaluation of these topics provides clarity in understanding humanity's role in God's overall plan. Luke reveals God's deep love and unpretentious care for people, providing his readers with a timeless account for an absolute timely application.

Christ's people are reminded of their unique identity in remarkably powerful terms, being reaffirmed of their adoption through the shedding of his blood, the renewal of their nature through redemption, and their summons to be set apart from all others (Eph. 1:3-14). Paul powerfully postulates, "Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self" (Eph. 4:22-24). As a former offender, Paul hungered for God's forgiving grace, recovering from his egotistical

¹⁰⁵ Bock, *The Luke NIV Application Commentary*, 26.

transgressions and his contemptible hatred for Christians. Luke records, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them in prison” (Acts 8:3). Paul underscores, “But I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me” (Rom. 7:23).

Christ is Humanity’s Hope

Shame is a phenomenon that infects all humans, disrupting and weakening every system it targets.¹⁰⁶ Its influence dwells in its elusiveness and secrecy. Shame takes on different forms, such as humiliation, embarrassment, indignity, disgrace or stigma.¹⁰⁷ Graciously, Jesus has come to empower humanity and strengthen them to walk steadily in the way to God’s kingdom. The New Testament Pauline Epistles highlight God’s beneficence, as he ushers humanity into a renewed creation (Rom. 8:18-25; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). As a consequence of God’s saving grace, sin and death no longer have power over God’s people. Although addiction may oppress humanity’s longing for God, erode its resolve, confound its rationale, and distort its conviction yet its oppression is never absolute. Robert Cox insinuates, “If they fall victim to this, there is still hope and help available so they do not have to continue to live a life of shame.”¹⁰⁸ Because of God’s unconditional love and his bountiful grace, the human spirit can never be annihilated by sin. Paul writes, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:5). Hope yields patience through the trials of life, refining character and fostering maturation (Rom. 5:3-4).

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 23.

¹⁰⁸ Cox, *A Man with a Dilemma*, 55.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd Who Cares for His Flock

God's concern for the continuous care and support for his people is distinctly manifest throughout Scripture. The Biblical imagery of the Lord as the shepherd of his people prolifically exemplifies God's paternal concern for his children, detailing his caring love for his creation.¹⁰⁹ Micha writes, "He shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God" (5:4). The shepherd metaphor is featured within a redemptive context, underscoring the deliverance of God's people from ensnarement. Jesus is the Great Shepherd who munificently attends to the various needs of his flock.¹¹⁰ Jesus declares, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

An intensely vivid depiction of the Lord as shepherd is accentuated in Psalm 23. Critical core features of the Great Shepherd are beautifully elucidated throughout the psalm. The Great Shepherd provides for the necessities of his flock, and brings them into bountiful surroundings. He gives them peace, and secures their lives from perilous antagonism. God uses the image of a shepherd to describe his relationship with his people, emphasizing his unconditional tenderheartedness, faithful leadership, insuperable strength, unwavering determination, indomitable courage, endless patience, personal attention, and unceasing vigilance. Isaiah postulates, "The Sovereign Lord comes with power, his arm rules for him. He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those that have young" (40:10-11). The shepherd model features fundamental characteristics exclusively attributed to God, who labors tirelessly to guarantee the wellbeing of his people.

¹⁰⁹ Timothy Witner, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2010), 11.

¹¹⁰ Glenn Wagner, *Escape from Church, Inc.: The Return of the Pastor-Shepherd* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1999), 115.

Conclusion

Addiction is a consequence of compulsive sin, endangering both body and spirit. It is the continued engagement in a behavior or action regardless of its negative consequences, resulting in loss of control and compulsivity. Its self-defeating dynamics hijack individual freedom, binds human desire, and halts spiritual formation. Shame is a toxic emotion that increases a person's vulnerability to forming an addictive behavior, intensifying the risk of relapse after recovery. The management of shame is an integral component for recovery from addiction, as it has been linked to delays in pursuing therapy, avoidance of clinical care, prolonged risk of deterioration, inconsistent adherence to treatment, elevated risks of health problems, and a plethora of deleterious impacts on health outcomes.

King David's downfall was not the outcome of one fatal mistake; however, it was the result of a sequence of increasingly foolish and selfish decisions. The shame he experienced led him to take every measure to conceal his actions. As a result, his behaviors became worse and the wickedness of his actions increased. At this point, David had achieved many of his life's goals, defeating his enemies, expanding his kingdom, and securely establishing his kingship over all of Israel (2 Sam. 1-4). The nations of the Philistines, Arameans, Moabites, and Edomites had been conquered (2 Sam. 8-10). The Ark of the Covenant had returned to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). He had multiple wives of beauty, prestige, wealth, and character (2 Sam. 3). David's success was unsurpassed yet rather than giving glory to God, David sought after the gratification of the pleasures of his heart. David's lack of focus on his calling to lead God's people and establish God's kingdom, as a man after God's own heart, put him in a situation in which he was vulnerable to temptation. As a result, David rapes Bathsheba, murders Uriah, and endangers the

lives of his countrymen (2 Sam. 11-12). Due to the brokenness of the human condition, David's sin continues to be repeated in the lives of many people today.

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ON PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION AND SHAME

Since the project will be addressing pornography addiction, its maladaptive outcomes on human functionality, the impediments of shame on recovery, and non-shame-based therapy, the researcher will review resources covering the various modes of the most current treatments for pornography addiction. These methods include breaking free from the shackles of shame, ways of identifying shame-triggered emotions, and strategies of building self-worth. Furthermore, the researcher will review resources on self-stigma and shame on individuals who suffer from pornography addiction. Research indicates that over time the number of people with pornography-related problems has rapidly increased and maladaptive behaviors associated with pornography addiction have become more severe.¹¹¹

As evidenced by an increase in marital conflict, isolation, depression, and distorted beliefs, as a Coptic Orthodox priest, the researcher has seen the growing impact of pornography addiction on human functionality, relationship development, and sexual intimacy. The researcher has also seen the impact of shame and stigmatization on those dealing with pornography addiction within the Coptic Orthodox community. The researcher will use significant and creditable resources authored and edited by medical physicians, psychologists, counselors, social workers, and other professionals in the field of mental health to support the thesis and its objectives. Furthermore, the researcher will use other notable and meaningful literature recognized by the various Orthodox denominations to substantiate the claims of the thesis and its objectives.

¹¹¹ Wendy Maltz and Larry Maltz, *The Porn Trap: The Essential Guide to Overcoming Problems Caused by Pornography* (New York: Harper Publishing, 2008), 1.

The Impact of the Internet on Pornography Addiction

Moreover, the development of the internet, the establishment of social network services, and the unwillingness of Internet users to disclose information about their use of pornographic paraphernalia have resulted in a plethora of problems and complications.¹¹² Presently, sexual addiction has become increasingly problematic, as accessibility and variability of sexual stimuli have become ubiquitous throughout the Internet. Caponnetto et al. postulate, “Digital technologies have permeated social, economic, political, and cultural life, transforming social relations, the identities of subjects, as well as the patterns of production and consumption.”¹¹³ Consequently, many significant factors associated with addiction to pornography have led addicts to become more inclined to experience the problem of sexual shame. Petrican et al. suggest that sexual compulsivity is linked to sexual shame and the continuous participation in maladaptive erotic pursuits, such as: excessive use of pornographic paraphernalia, excessive masturbation, anonymous sexual encounters, romantic obsessions, and prolonged promiscuity.¹¹⁴

Religiosity and Sexual Shame

Further research insinuates that people who are more religiously committed suffer more severely from sexual shame than those who are nonreligious.¹¹⁵ David De Jong and Casey Cook theorize, “Exploratory analyses revealed that religious primes were associated with higher

¹¹² Caponnetto et al., “Sexual Addiction, Hypersexual Behavior and Relative Psychological Dynamics during the Period of Social Distancing and Stay-at-Home Policies Due to COVID-19,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 2704 (2022): 3.

¹¹³ Caponnetto et al., “Sexual Addiction, Hypersexual Behavior,” 3.

¹¹⁴ Raluca Petrican, Christopher Burris, and Morris Moscovitch, “Shame, Sexual Compulsivity, and Eroticizing Flirtatious Others: An Experimental Study,” *Journal of Sex Research* 52, no. 1 (2015): 98.

¹¹⁵ Joshua Grubbs, Jennifer Grant, and Joel Engelman, “Self-Identification as a Pornography Addict: Examining the Roles of Pornography Use, Religiousness, and Moral Incongruence,” *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 25 no. 4 (2018): 269.

shame, and in turn, perceived addiction among individuals high on both organizational religiosity and obsessive-compulsive disorder compulsivity subscales.”¹¹⁶ Additionally, Snoek et al. purport that moralization could be extremely harmful and counterproductive to shame-prone individuals as it reinforces their emotions of shame and leads them to further their self-defeating behaviors.¹¹⁷ Therefore, it is imperative for counselors to consider a person’s religious beliefs and worldviews in order to provide appropriate treatments. It is also important that priests, pastors, and ministers become properly equipped to provide pastoral care needed to individuals suffering from pornography addiction.

The Disorder of Sexual Addiction

Sexual intimacy is an integral component of human functionality, comprised of cravings, thoughts, and fantasies.¹¹⁸ However, when these cravings, thoughts, and fantasies begin to negatively impact an individual or other people in that person’s life, they begin to qualify as maladaptive and dysfunctional. Sexual addiction is characterized as a disorder marked by intrusive and obsessive sexual cravings, thoughts, and fantasies.¹¹⁹ Sexual addiction is emphasized by persistent, escalating, and compulsive cravings, thoughts, and fantasies about sexual activities, causing the individual to become obsessed and preoccupied with sex, regardless of possible negative impacts and consequences. Individuals suffering from sexual addiction can

¹¹⁶ David De Jong and Casey Cook, “Roles of Religiosity, Obsessive-Compulsive Symptoms, Scrupulosity, and Shame in Self-Perceived Pornography Addiction: A Preregistered Study,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 50 (2021): 695.

¹¹⁷ Snoek et al., “Managing Shame and Guilt in Addiction: A Pathway to Recovery,” *Journal of Addictive Behaviors* 120 (2021): 2.

¹¹⁸ Kring et al., *Abnormal Psychology* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2014): 360.

¹¹⁹ Caponnetto et al., “Sexual Addiction, Hypersexual Behavior,” 2.

spend extensive periods of time pursuing sexual gratification to the detriment of their physical health, occupational functioning, financial security, and relational durability.

Sexual Addiction is an addiction to an orgasmic reaction, which involves the release of sexual tension, elevation in heart rate, and secretion of pleasure hormones into the bloodstream.¹²⁰ As a result, for sex addicts, sexual behaviors become problematic as these activities disrupt and impair essential areas of functioning. Alex Kwee notes that psychology has included sexual addiction among the various behavioral addictions, as it features similar neurological mechanisms.¹²¹ Sexual addiction is associated with loss of control over sexual behavior, leading to emotional, physical, social, and spiritual deleterious outcomes. Lewczuk et al. note, “Loss of control over sexual behavior is a trans-conceptual criterion probably present in all conceptualizations of problematic sexual behavior.”¹²²

Sexual Addiction is a consequence of hypersexuality, which is understood as intensified, unrestrained, and compulsive sexual urges, fantasies, and behaviors that alter an addict’s state of consciousness to the point of impulse control. Pasquale Caponnetto et. al. postulate, “This psycho-physio-pathological condition that is correlated with an alteration of the cerebral gratification system involving a coarctation of the modality in which the individual obtains satisfaction and pleasure.”¹²³ Similar to the process of chemical addiction, individuals suffering from sexual addiction experience the phenomena of cravings, tolerance, relapse, and withdrawal.

¹²⁰ Alex Kwee, “Constructing Addiction from Experience and Context: Peele and Brodsky’s Love and Addiction Revisited,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 14 (2007): 223.

¹²¹ Kwee, “Constructing Addiction from Experience and Context,” 223.

¹²² Lewczuk et al., “Variability of Pornographic Content Consumed and Longest Session of Pornography Use Associated with Treatment Seeking and Problematic Sexual Behavior Symptoms,” *Men’s Sexual Health Journal* 9 (2021): 2.

¹²³ Caponnetto et al., “Sexual Addiction, Hypersexual Behavior,” 2.

As a result, the need to increase sexual behaviors and their intensity to maintain the desired effect will gradually manifest into severe bio-psycho-social-pneumatic changes.

Hypersexuality

Hypersexuality is described as the inability to regulate one's sexual behavior, resulting in significant personal distress.¹²⁴ It has been characterized as having a pattern of intense, persistent, and excessive compulsivity with sexual urges, sexual fantasies, and uncontrolled sexual behaviors sought after, not for the provision of sexual pleasure or gratification, but for the prevention of distress or anxiety. Michael Walton et. al. postulate, "Hypersexuality was considered for inclusion as a psychiatric disorder within the Sexual Dysfunctions section of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders."¹²⁵ Hypersexuality may include consensual sex, masturbation, pornography, sexual masochism, voyeurism, or exhibitionism.

Hypersexuality is delineated as an obsessive–compulsive type of disorder, marked by repetitive behaviors intended to minimize or prevent personal anxiety or distress.¹²⁶ The American Psychiatric Association defines hypersexuality as "An excessive preoccupation with sexual fantasies, urges or behaviors that is difficult to control, causes you distress, or negatively affects your health, job, relationships or other parts of your life."¹²⁷ Obsessions consist of persistent and recurrent intrusive thoughts, feelings, fantasies or urges, which are driven by an anticipated relief from anxiety or distress. Bancroft and Vukadinovic suggest that some

¹²⁴ Walton et al., "Hypersexuality: A Critical Review and Introduction to the "Sexhavior Cycle,"" *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 46 (2017): 2238.

¹²⁵ Walton et al., "Hypersexuality: A Critical Review," 2232.

¹²⁶ Short et al., "Clinicians' Beliefs, Observations, and Treatment Effectiveness Regarding Clients' Sexual Addiction and Internet Pornography Use," *Community Mental Health Journal* 52 (2016): 1070.

¹²⁷ American Psychiatric Association (2013).

hypersexual individuals experience an increase in sexual arousal as a conditioned response to certain types of distressing stimuli.¹²⁸ These intrusive feelings, thoughts, fantasies, urges, or behaviors become negatively reinforced, as they possess a tendency to become paired with the elimination or minimization of aversive stimuli.¹²⁹ As a result, sexual obsession and compulsion becomes habitual, chronic, and strengthened by the process of negative reinforcement.

Over time, hypersexuality leads to the achievement of sexual gratification, resulting in the minimization of painful emotions or distressful situations. Repeated failures to modulate sexual behavior and the continuation of sexual behavior despite significant problematic outcomes result in sexual addiction.¹³⁰ Ultimately, sexual addiction involves pleasure-seeking impulsive behavior driven by positive reinforcement and compulsive behavior for the reduction of dysphoric impacts driven by negative reinforcement. Therefore, sexual addiction results in a pathological craving for sexual behaviors led by a neurological deficiency of neurochemicals associated with ecstasy and euphoria.¹³¹

Additional research indicates that hypersexuality is not solely a chronic condition of the brain's reward and motivation systems, but also of memory and correlated circuitry that are expressed biologically, psychologically, and socially. Walton et al. postulate, "Dysfunction within a person's frontal cortical systems—believed responsible for regulating decision making and inhibitory control over sexual functioning—may lead to impaired judgment and impulsivity

¹²⁸ John Bancroft and Zoran Vukadinovic, "Sexual Addiction, Sexual Compulsivity, Sexual Impulsivity, or What? Toward a Theoretical Model," *Journal of Sex Research* 41, no.3 (2004): 225.

¹²⁹ Walton et al., "Hypersexuality: A Critical Review," 2236.

¹³⁰ Walton et al., "Hypersexuality: A Critical Review," 2238.

¹³¹ Walton et al., "Hypersexuality: A Critical Review," 2238.

regarding sexual behavior.”¹³² Additional research postulates that hypersexuality disturbs memory and its correlated circuitry, explaining the reasons why hypersexual individuals continue to engage in their sexual behaviors regardless of to their distressing consequences.¹³³

Furthermore, research suggests that when compared to non-hypersexual individuals, hypersexual individuals display heightened sexual cravings when exposed to sexually explicit paraphernalia. This increased sexual arousal for hypersexual individuals has been linked to the activation of the dorsal anterior cingulate, ventral striatum, and amygdala regions of the brain.¹³⁴

Sexual satiation takes place when a person’s sexual urge is either gratified or reaches the state at which it begins to decline.¹³⁵ Subsequently, postsexual satiation, during which a person’s sexual arousal dissipates and steadily reverts to a state of non-sexual arousal, describes the biopsychological process that proceeds sexual satiation. The sexual cycle is complete when an individual returns to a condition of non-sexual arousal. Unless sexual urges are resisted, suppressed, or disrupted, an individual’s sexual arousal intensifies and transpires into sexual activity.¹³⁶ The sexual cycle re-starts when a person undergoes a new sexual urge, which intensifies as sexual arousal heightens.

Compulsive Sexual Behavior Disorder (CSBD)

Compulsive Sexual Behavior Disorder (CSBD), which has been included in the International Classification of Diseases, 11th revision (ICD-11), is characterized by problematic

¹³² Walton et al., “Hypersexuality: A Critical Review,” 2239.

¹³³ Walton et al., “Hypersexuality: A Critical Review,” 2239.

¹³⁴ Walton et al., “Hypersexuality: A Critical Review,” 2239.

¹³⁵ Walton et al., “Hypersexuality: A Critical Review,” 2243.

¹³⁶ Walton et al., “Hypersexuality: A Critical Review,” 2247.

pornography use in conjunction with compulsive masturbation.¹³⁷ King et al. define compulsions as, “Repetitive, clearly excessive behaviors or mental acts that the person feels driven to perform to reduce the anxiety caused by obsessive thoughts or to prevent some calamity from occurring.”¹³⁸ Sexual impulses are among the leading forms of compulsions, characterized by persistent and intrusive cravings, thoughts, and fantasies that are extremely disruptive to normal functioning.¹³⁹

Problematic pornography use includes loss of control, troubles in sexual functioning, adverse outcomes for romantic relationships, negative impacts on daily operations, participation in various types of problematic behavior, and alteration in the functioning of the brain. Variability and characteristics of the consumed pornographic paraphernalia, frequency of pornography use, and the length of viewing time pose major concerns regarding problematic sexual behavior and compulsive sexual behavior disorder. Lewczuk et al posit, “This behavioral pattern is sometimes referred to as binge behavior and seems to be quite commonplace in addicts.”¹⁴⁰ Presently, the internet provides an expansive variety, multiple distinct categories, and effortless access of explicit content worldwide.

Furthermore, research indicates that numerous unsuccessful attempts to control persistent sexual behavior are a core characteristic of CSBD.¹⁴¹ Oftentimes, patterns of abstinence, depravation, or self-discipline appear to be commonly correlated to subsequent episodes of substantial episodic involvement in problematic behavior. Researchers insinuate that CDBD is

¹³⁷ Lewczuk et al., “Variability of Pornographic Content Consumed,” 1-2.

¹³⁸ Kring et al., *Abnormal Psychology*, 203.

¹³⁹ Kring et al., *Abnormal Psychology*, 203.

¹⁴⁰ Lewczuk et al., “Variability of Pornographic Content Consumed,” 2.

¹⁴¹ Lewczuk et al. “Variability of Pornographic Content Consumed,” 2.

correlated to various negative characteristics, such as personality changes, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, attention deficit disorder, intimacy complications, relationship difficulties, family problems, and financial loss.¹⁴² Petrican et al. purport, “Sexual compulsivity predicts greater likelihood of multiple sex partners, more single-occurrence partners, more extra-relational sexual encounters, and more frequent unprotected sex.”¹⁴³

Pornography Addiction

Pornography addiction is among the primary categories of sexual addiction and is delineated as a dysfunctional pattern of excessive exposure to sexually stimulating material that manifests in physiological, psychological and cognitive symptoms.¹⁴⁴ Symptoms of pornography addiction include continuance, intentionality, loss of control, reduction of meaningful activities, excessive time spent in preparing, engaging or recovering from the behavior, increased tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms. Pornography addiction is explicitly characterized by one’s inability to control use to the point that its use interferes with one’s priorities, obligations, and necessities. One of the primary features of pornography is its focus on independent physical pleasure rather than the relational aspects of sex, contributing to an elevation in problems of daily living.¹⁴⁵ Park et al. elucidate, “Internet pornography’s unique properties (limitless novelty, potential for easy escalation to more extreme material, video format, etc.) may be potent enough to condition

¹⁴² Short et al., “Clinicians’ Beliefs, Observations, and Treatment Effectiveness,” 1071.

¹⁴³ Petrican et al., “Shame, Sexual Compulsivity,” 98.

¹⁴⁴ Ester Leutenberg and John Liptak, *The Sex Addiction Workbook: Information, Assessments, and Tools for Managing Life with a Behavioral Addiction* (Duluth: Whole Person Associates, 2021), v.

¹⁴⁵ Short et al., “Clinicians’ Beliefs, Observations, and Treatment Effectiveness,” 1071.

sexual arousal to aspects of Internet pornography use that do not readily transition to real-life partners.”¹⁴⁶

Pornography addiction has been recognized as one of the main behavioral addictions that lead to tolerance and desensitization.¹⁴⁷ Tolerance to extensive pornography use is noticeable in frequency and length of time devoted to pornography in attempt to achieve an orgasmic reaction. Additionally, tolerance is indicated by more frequent exposure to sexual content or more frequent engagement in sexual behavior in order to produce the desired effect.¹⁴⁸ Individuals suffering from pornography addiction, desensitization is apparent in their pursuit to consume more stimulating pornographic paraphernalia and their persistence in searching for more arousing stimuli. Internet pornography provides many opportunities for individuals to participate in problematic sexual activities, worsening the behavior and complicating its impact.

Problematic Impacts of Pornography Use

Additional research underscores that various conceptualizations of problematic pornography use have been proposed to elicit emotional difficulties, negative cognitions, and functional impairment.¹⁴⁹ Further research suggests that problematic pornography use is a primary reason for erectile dysfunction, difficulty orgasming during sexual intercourse, unaccustomed premature ejaculation, decreased sexual satisfaction, and diminished libido during partnered sexual activities.¹⁵⁰ Individuals addicted to pornography exhibit behavioral persistence

¹⁴⁶ Park et al., “Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions? A Review with Clinical Reports,” *Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 6 no. 7 (2016): 1.

¹⁴⁷ Lewczuk et al., “Variability of Pornographic Content Consumed,” 2.

¹⁴⁸ Kring et al., *Abnormal Psychology*, 286.

¹⁴⁹ Andrew Allen, Lee Kannis-Dymand, and Mary Katsikitis, “Problematic Internet Pornography Use: The Role of Craving, Desire, Thinking, and Metacognition,” *Journal of Addictive Behaviors* 70 (2017): 66.

¹⁵⁰ Park et al., “Is Internet Pornography,” 1.

due to the dynamics of positive and negative reinforcement, exhibiting craving for behavioral participation, excessive behavioral participation, diminished self-control over the behavior, and continual behavioral participation regardless of personal, social, or occupational impairment.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, pornography addiction leads to loss of attraction to real sexual partners, formation of unusual porn fetishes, diminished pair bonding within romantic relationships, and increased levels of social anxiety and depression.¹⁵² Patrick Carnes postulates, “Within the addictive system, sexual experience becomes the reason for being – the primary relationship for the addict.”¹⁵³

The Neurobiology and Reward Circuitry of Sexual Function

Sex is a naturally complex and rewarding activity of healthy intimate romantic relationships that generates the release of several neurotransmitters and is coupled with the brain’s reward circuitry.¹⁵⁴ The desire and motivation for the pursuit of sex and sexual pleasure arise primarily from a neurochemical called dopamine. Dopamine pathways in the brain are prominently linked to pleasure and reward. During sexual arousal, the brain releases the chemical dopamine, which is often referred to as the pleasure neurotransmitter.¹⁵⁵ In the course of sexual consummation, endogenous opioids, which are naturally produced in the body for mood regulation, motivation, and learning, are released.¹⁵⁶ The reward experienced during sexual

¹⁵¹ Stephanie Antons and Brand Matthias, “Inhibitory Control and Problematic Internet-Pornography Use – The Important Balancing Role of the Insula,” *Journal of Behavioral Addictions* (2020): 2.

¹⁵² Gary Wilson. *Your Brain on Porn: Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction* (Kent: Commonwealth Publishing, 2014), 33-59.

¹⁵³ Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction* (Center City: Hazelden Publishing, 2001), 7.

¹⁵⁴ Amanda Giordano, *A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions: Conceptualization, Assessments and Clinical Strategies* (New York: Springer Publishing, 2022), 104.

¹⁵⁵ Giordano, *A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions*, 20.

activity activates the reward circuitry of the brain and promotes the perpetuation of the behavior. Amanda Giordano writes, “Rewards are any stimuli that produce positive effects (i.e., positive emotions or behaviors) or foster wanting and approach behaviors, and thus, are subjectively assigned value.”¹⁵⁷ Stimuli that promote positive experiences are recognized by the brain as means of reward and are assigned value. In turn, the brain makes an association between the specific stimulus and the experience of reward, thus encouraging the continuation of the behavior.

The Dopaminergic Reward Circuitry of the Central Nervous System

Dopamine is an essential endogenous catecholamine, which functions as both a neurotransmitter and as an autocrine or paracrine agent.¹⁵⁸ Within the central nervous system, dopamine binds to specific membrane receptors, serving a primary function in the regulation of movement, memory, learning, cognition, and emotion. Dopamine is a primary culprit in various neurological and psychiatric disorders, which include, but are not limited to, Parkinson's disease, schizophrenia, substance dependency, and behavioral addictions. Stressful situations have been reported to alter normal dopaminergic neurotransmission, and exposure to stress strongly stimulate dopaminergic activity.

Pornography Addiction and Dopamine

Researchers identify pornography as a supernormal stimulus, or an exaggerated artificial amplification of an innate instinct that possesses amplified qualities people find compelling and

¹⁵⁶ Giordano, *A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions*, 19.

¹⁵⁷ Giordano, *A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions*, 21.

¹⁵⁸ Naila Rasheed and Abdullah Alghasham, “Central Dopaminergic System and Its Implications in Stress-Mediated Neurological Disorders and Gastric Ulcers: Short Review,” *Advances in Pharmacological Sciences* 182671 (2012): 1.

elicit more reward pathway activation than a natural stimulus.¹⁵⁹ The dopaminergic circuitry of the central nervous system is responsible for the appetitive drive behind sexual addiction.¹⁶⁰ Remarkably, it is evident that the same dopaminergic pathways underline the various types of addictions, both chemical and behavioral.¹⁶¹ Pornography causes a surge of dopamine release, consolidating the neural pathways of behavior and solidifying neural connections. Harvard Mela purports, “Every time we watch porn, we strengthen pathways for arousal that counteract the natural one. So, for every video we watch we ruin our enjoyment and willingness to meet real people.”¹⁶² Therefore, constant use of pornographic paraphernalia joined by constant dopamine release strengthen the neural networks that combine the use of pornography with reward.

The availability of pornographic content and the accessibility of virtual platforms on the Internet are unmatched in comparison to offline partnership and the involvement of healthy intimate romantic relationships. Gary Wilson writes, “When we make an artificial supernormal stimulus our top priority it’s because it has triggered a bigger blast of dopamine in our brain’s reward circuit than its natural counterpart.”¹⁶³ As a result, as a supernormal stimulus, pornography fosters compulsivity, desensitization, and loss of control over sexual behaviors, fueling the drive for users to persistently find more stimulating novelty.

¹⁵⁹ Giordano, *A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions*, 104.

¹⁶⁰ Lisa Cohen “Sex Addiction: The Fire Down Below” in *The Behavioral Addictions*, Michael Ascher and Petros Levounis, (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2015), 144.

¹⁶¹ Cohen, “Sex Addiction: The Fire Down Below,” 144.

¹⁶² Harvard Mela, *How to Thrive in the 21st Century by Avoiding Porn and Other Distractions: A Guide to Life in the Information Age* (Middletown: Harvard Mela, 2021): 64.

¹⁶³ Wilson, *Your Brain on Porn*, 72.

In the brain, pleasure circuits regulate emotions, urges, impulses, and subconscious decision-making.¹⁶⁴ The reward system is comprised of neural structures tasked with incentive salience, wanting, craving, or pursuing a reward or a motivation. The majority of people who use pornography resort to it as a solution to sexual frustration, a way to cope with stress, or a means to overcome loneliness.¹⁶⁵ In other words, people who engage in addictive behaviors do not only do them to feel good, but also do them to not feel bad.

Consequently, continuous use of pornography activates the reward and pleasure areas of the brain, resulting in the need for larger doses of dopamine to achieve the desired outcome.¹⁶⁶ Pornography use causes substantial spikes of dopamine, leading to a decrease in dopamine responses from other activities.¹⁶⁷ Low levels of dopamine are linked to shame, diminished self-worth, procrastination, self-doubt, lack of motivation, and low enthusiasm. As a result, tolerance is indicated by longer periods or more extensive periods of watching pornography than planned to accomplish the desired outcome. Over time, the reward system becomes dysregulated and in intense circumstances leads to substantial deterioration of dopamine function in these pathways, rendering individuals suffering from pornography addiction extremely dependent on external sources of dopamine stimulation. Lisa Cohen theorizes, “The addiction may co-opt the reward system, so that other sources of reward no longer activate it as strongly as do cues related to the addictive object.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Kring et al., *Abnormal Psychology*, 360.

¹⁶⁵ D’Onte Carroll, *Saved, Sanctified and Addicted to Porn: Overcoming Sexual Perversion* (Accokeek: Kingdom Living Publishing, 2017): 15.

¹⁶⁶ Wilson, *Your Brain on Porn*, 66.

¹⁶⁷ Mela, *How to Thrive in the 21st Century*, 11.

¹⁶⁸ Cohen “Sex Addiction: The Fire Down Below,” 145.

Criteria for Pornography Addiction

The criteria for pornography addiction parallel the ones used for sex addiction, which assesses the degree of involvement, the level of dependency, and the seriousness of maladaptive behaviors.¹⁶⁹ As stated previously, sexual addiction is a behavioral dysfunction that focuses on sexual urges, sexual fantasies, and the obsession of pursuing objectified non-intimate sexuality, such as pornography, prostitution, and promiscuity.¹⁷⁰ According to the criteria, users meeting a minimum of three out of ten components are considered addicted to pornography:¹⁷¹

- Persistent failure to resist urges to watch pornography
- Longer and more extensive periods of watching pornography than planned
- Unsuccessful repeated efforts to eliminate, reduce, or control behavior
- Compulsive sexual cravings, including excessive masturbation
- Excessive amount of time spent acquiring pornographic paraphernalia, watching pornography, and/or engaging in sexual behavior, such as masturbation, with another person or through the use of an object
- Inordinate amount of time recovering from sexual experiences
- Being preoccupied with sexual fantasy, sexual thoughts, and/or the preparation of sexual activities
- Watching pornography takes considerable time away from important obligations and personal responsibilities
- Continuation of behavior regardless of negative consequences
- Tolerance – over time behavior becomes more frequent or intense to achieve desired effect
- Deliberate limitation of occupational, social, or recreational activities in order to engage or allow time for watching pornography
- Withdrawal – distress, irritability, or restlessness if unable to watch pornography. Withdrawal symptoms may include: headaches, dizziness, body aches, sleeplessness, anxiety, mood swings, or depression.

¹⁶⁹ David Whitehead, *Sex, Porn and Masturbation Addiction Mastery: A Comprehensive Practical Guide to Refocusing your Sexual Energy; Identifying, Solving and Recovering from Sexual and Love Addictions* (Middletown: Silk Publishing, 2021): 2.

¹⁷⁰ Cohen, “Sex Addiction: The Fire Down Below,” 137.

¹⁷¹ Kevin Skinner, *Treating Pornography Addiction: The Essential Tool for Recovery* (London: K. Skinner Corp., 2005): 23.

Development and Impairment

As previously noted, pornography use produces an immense stimulation of the brain reward system, resulting in the neglect and abandonment of normal activities and responsibilities. Evidence indicates that these behaviors stimulate the brain reward systems in a similar manner to stimulation initiated by abused drugs.¹⁷² The road to recovery from addiction is a lengthy and tumultuous path and the healing process is far from an easy one. There are people who perceive pornography use as a harmless activity, however, all compulsive behavior eventually leads to addiction. Similar to all types of addictions, pornography addiction is complex in nature and requires much research and exploration.

Neurobiological Factors

Pornography addiction has neurobiological factors.¹⁷³ Pornographic paraphernalia impacts neuronal structures and processes essential for the control and management of healthy mood, behavior, and motivations. Primarily, addiction is a neurobiological illness that corrupts the normal circuitry of reward and adaptive behaviors.¹⁷⁴ Essential neurotransmitters and neuro-circuits highlight the pathological changes at the various stages. The neurotransmitter dopamine is always involved with addictive activities associated with pleasure and reward. This neurotransmitter plays a key role in the way addictive behaviors impact the brain.

¹⁷² Michael Ascher and Petros Levounis, *The Behavioral Addictions*, (Arlington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2015), xi.

¹⁷³ Stephen Ross and Eric Peselow, "The Neurobiology of Addictive Disorders," *Journal of Clinical Neuropharmacology* 32, no.5 (2009): 270.

¹⁷³ Edward Khantzian, "Reflections on Treating Addictive Disorders: A Psychodynamic Perspective," *The American Journal on Addictions* 21, no. 3 (2012): 275.

¹⁷⁴ Ross and Peselow, "The Neurobiology of Addictive Disorders," 270.

Generally, neurotransmitters are highly involved in a number of bodily functions, such as impulse control, sleep, appetite, sexual behaviors, and pain adjustment.¹⁷⁵ Dopamine is one of the most extensively researched and studied neurotransmitters in the nervous system and has been the focus of addiction research for a number of decades. As previously noted, dopamine is involved in the regulation of fine motor movements, learning, motivation and cognitive functioning.¹⁷⁶ Dopamine pathways in the brain are linked to pleasure and reward, and it is through the dopamine system that these feelings are produced. Several stimuli, such as food, sex, and addictive drugs elevate the levels of dopamine in the nucleus accumbens, which is the neural interface between motivation and action.

Cognitive-Behavioral Factors

Addiction possesses cognitive-behavioral factors.¹⁷⁷ Oftentimes, conduct disorder can be likened to behavior or substance use disorders. Overtime, compulsive pornography use becomes an addictive behavior. Research suggests pornography is a behavioral pattern with outcomes similar to substance and addictive disorders.¹⁷⁸ Pornographic paraphernalia activates similar reward systems that are targeted by drugs of abuse. Sexual activity possesses rewarding and reinforcing elements, activating the reward system in the brain. Compulsive use of pornographic paraphernalia causes continual and ongoing disruptions of normal sexual patterns or behaviors.

¹⁷⁵ Ahsan Nazeer and Michael Liepman, "Understanding Substance Use Disorders," *Journal of International Public Health* 6 no.3 (2014): 226.

¹⁷⁶ Nazeer and Liepman, "Understanding Substance Use Disorder," 228.

¹⁷⁷ Bradley Conner and John Lochman, "Comorbid Conduct Disorder and Substance Use Disorders," *Journal of Clinical Psychology Science and Practice* 17 no. 4 (2010): 338.

¹⁷⁸ Mark Moran, "Gambling Disorder to be Included in Addictions Chapter," *Psychiatric News* 48 no.8 (2013): 5-6.

These disturbances result in hypersexuality, which, over time, causes impairment of physical health and psychosocial functioning.

Sociocultural Factors

Sociocultural factors play a major role in pornography addiction.¹⁷⁹ Understanding the cultural norms and standards for acceptable behaviors is quintessential in discovering the reasons for the compulsive use of pornographic paraphernalia in a given society. People's engagement in, concealment of, and access to pornography are oftentimes influenced by their social networks, cultural norms, and religious affiliations about acceptable behavior. Family factors, community settings, and social networks are extremely important to the influence and exposure to pornographic paraphernalia. Availability, marketing, and accessibility to pornography are critical factors of elevated rates of abuse.

Psychodynamic Factors

A comprehension of the struggle and suffering that make addiction extraordinarily powerful is needed to provide a humanistic psychological approach for understanding addictive disorders. Edward Khantzian posits that psychodynamic psychotherapy is an effective model for the comprehension of a wide range of psychiatric disorders.¹⁸⁰ The psychodynamic approach claims that addiction is a self-regulatory disorder. Furthermore, Edward Khantzian adds, "More precisely, individuals with addictions suffer because they cannot or do not regulate their emotions, self-esteem, relationship, and their behavior."¹⁸¹ This model explicates that humans

¹⁷⁹ Conner and Lochman, "Comorbid Conduct Disorder," 339.

¹⁸⁰ Edward Khantzian, "Reflections on Treating Addictive Disorders: A Psychodynamic Perspective," *The American Journal on Addictions* 21, no. 3 (2012): 275.

¹⁸¹ Khantzian, "Reflections on Treating Addictive Disorders," 275.

are governed less by instincts and more by coping skills and capacities acquired from society and the environment.

The psychodynamic ideology purports that human survival and adaption place a serious challenge on human self-regulation.¹⁸² The self-regulation conflicts are key to addictive vulnerability. First, it is quintessential for individuals to recognize, differentiate, verbalize, tolerate, and regulate feelings and emotions. Second, it is imperative for individuals to develop and maintain a coherent and comfortable sense of self and self-esteem. Third, it is essential for individuals to establish and maintain adequate, appropriate, comforting, and comfortable personal relationships and social networks. Finally, it is extremely important to develop and maintain the proper control and regulation of behavior, especially self-care. The inability and failure to self-regulate creates a potential for substance abuse and addiction. Addictive behaviors alter emotions, affect sense of self, depreciate wellbeing, decrease self-esteem, impact the ability to care for others, and negatively influence the capacity to self-care.¹⁸³

The Cycle of Sexual Addiction

Sexual addiction is suggested to be maintained by a cycle of triggers, cognitive preoccupation, obsession, and fantasy.¹⁸⁴ Typically, addictions are cyclical, possessing no apparent beginning or end. One stage of addiction leads to the next, rendering individuals suffering from pornography addiction incapable of overcoming its problematic impacts. In sexual addiction, sexual triggers lead to sexual fantasies, which, over time, become rituals, and,

¹⁸² Khantzian, "Reflections on Treating Addictive Disorders," 276.

¹⁸³ Khantzian, "Reflections on Treating Addictive Disorders," 276.

¹⁸⁴ Walton et al., "Hypersexuality: A Critical Review," 2238.

in turn, lead to compulsive sexual behaviors in response to emotional despair, consistent with an ashamed sense of self.¹⁸⁵

Triggers are stimuli that generate a need or want to act out sexually. Triggers are comprised of diverse emotions such as, shame, guilt, or blame. Oftentimes, for individuals suffering from sex addiction, triggers serve as pain agent, involving either short-term or long-term psychological, emotional, or physical discomfort. Uncomfortable emotions such as shame, anger, depression, anxiety, loneliness, boredom, and stress can easily trigger the desire to escape, avoid, or dissociate. Triggers can also be visual imagery or illustrations, depicting nudity or sexual behaviors. Auditory triggers are sounds or noises associated with sexual behaviors. Olfactory triggers are odors, scents, or fragrances associated with past sexual partners or environments where sexual activity had taken place.

After individuals suffering from sexual addiction are triggered by the various stimuli that generate the craving for sexual activity, the need to emotionally escape or dissociate becomes pervasive.¹⁸⁶ As a result, they begin to unconsciously fantasize about different scenarios of sexual activity. Sexual fantasy is a coping mechanism, by which individuals suffering from sexual addiction begin to think about past sexual encounters and become preoccupied with thoughts of future sexual activities. Fantasy leads them to become preoccupied to the point of obsession. They begin to think of other people as sex objects, contemplating the possibility of performing sexual acts with them.

¹⁸⁵ Whitehead, *Sex, Porn and Masturbation Addiction Mastery*, 7.

¹⁸⁶ Mark Laaser, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 47.

The Four-Stage Sexual Cycle of Addiction

The cycle of sexual addiction is a degenerative process that becomes imprinted neurologically, developing into a pattern of emotions and behaviors that are psychologically difficult to change.¹⁸⁷ Reid and Woolley insinuate that hypersexual individuals may become psychologically dependent upon neurochemicals associated with ecstasy and euphoria, which are then activated when sexually aroused.¹⁸⁸ Mark Laaser purports that the vicious cycle of addiction may gratify the physical craving for sex, but will never satisfy the emotional and spiritual craving deep within the soul.¹⁸⁹ For individuals suffering from sexual addiction, an addictive experience progresses through a four-stage cycle that intensifies with each repetition: Stage 1, Preoccupation; Stage 2, Ritualization; Stage 3, Compulsive Sexual Behavior; and Stage 4, Despair.¹⁹⁰

Stage 1: Preoccupation

The four-stage cycle of sexual addiction begins with preoccupation, in which individuals suffering from sexual addiction are mentally consumed with thoughts, emotions, and fantasies associate with sexual behavior.¹⁹¹ Preoccupation is a trance-like state wherein the mind is completely engrossed with thoughts of sexual behavior, instigating an obsessive search for sexual stimulation.¹⁹² This intense preoccupation interferes with daily responsibilities and life

¹⁸⁷ Laaser, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, 35.

¹⁸⁸ Rory Reid and Scott Woolley, "Using Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples to Resolve Attachment Ruptures Created by Hypersexual Behavior," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 13 (2006): 219.

¹⁸⁹ Laaser, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, 35.

¹⁹⁰ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 5.

¹⁹¹ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 5.

¹⁹² Eric Gomez, "Sexual Addiction: Understanding the Addiction Cycle," *Seattle Christian Counseling*, (2022): 1.

tasks as powerful sexual thoughts, emotions, and fantasies override all other cognitions.¹⁹³ Patrick Carnes notes, “Nowhere is this more visible than in the search for sex on the Internet. Hours pass while you’re gazing at pornographic images on the computer screen or sending instant messages.”¹⁹⁴ The trans-like state of preoccupation intensifies sexual arousal, alters mood and metabolic responses, and masks the personal distress of remorse or regret. Eventually, preoccupation leads to ritualistic behavior, as individuals suffering from sexual addiction prepare for sexual activity. Intense preoccupation with the gratification of sexual cravings and the failure to regulate sexual impulses fuel risky sexual behaviors and sexual compulsivity.¹⁹⁵

Stage 2: Ritualization

Ritualization are the particular routines that lead up to sexual behavior.¹⁹⁶ Ritualization is an important component of the cycle of addiction.¹⁹⁷ It is the stage in which fantasy inches closer to reality. It is often characterized by arousal, excitement, and intensity, producing a dopamine high sought after by a sex addict.¹⁹⁸ This stage causes a psychological and emotional trance, making it difficult for individuals suffering from sexual addiction to escape. Due to the consistency and repetition of the process, those suffering from sexual addiction begin to lose awareness and focus of real-world concerns, paying more attention to sexual fantasies and the means for achieving sexual gratification.¹⁹⁹ They seek to stretch out this stage as long as possible

¹⁹³ Giordano, *A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions*, 78.

¹⁹⁴ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 5.

¹⁹⁵ Petrican et al., “Shame, Sexual Compulsivity,” 98.

¹⁹⁶ Gomez, “Sexual Addiction,” 2.

¹⁹⁷ Laaser, *The 7 Principles of Highly Accountable Men*, 65.

¹⁹⁸ Whitehead, *Sex, Porn and Masturbation Addiction Mastery*, 7.

¹⁹⁹ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 5.

by spending more time watching porn, cruising the web for sexual content, chatting on sex sites, and playing online sex games. Amanda Giordano theorizes that rituals may include using illicit drugs, visiting specific locations, searching for certain websites, cruising the Internet for potential sexual partners, and engaging in particular sexual behaviors.²⁰⁰ Ultimately, not performing the ritual subjects individuals suffering from sexual addiction to the full force of the distress provoked by the stimulus.²⁰¹

Stage 3: Compulsive Sexual Behavior

The first two stages of the sexual cycle are not always visible, as individuals suffering from sexual addiction strive to hide the behavior from other people.²⁰² Conversely, during the third stage, as they act out sexual behaviors with sexual partners, their behaviors are exposed to others. During the third stage, individuals suffering from sexual addiction eventually reach orgasm, achieving sexual gratification, either solo or with other partners.²⁰³ As they reach the final stage, the fantasy-driven escape and dissociation are the ultimate goal.²⁰⁴ Since orgasm terminates the fantasy-fueled dopamine high and hurls them back into the real world to deal with its requirements, duties, and challenges, individuals suffering from sexual addiction will attempt to delay orgasm for as long as possible. Ultimately, their primary goal is to escape emotional discomfort, preferring to delay the pleasure of orgasm.

²⁰⁰ Giordano, *A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions*, 78.

²⁰¹ Kring et al., *Abnormal Psychology*, 211.

²⁰² Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 6.

²⁰³ Giordano, *A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions*, 78.

²⁰⁴ Whitehead, *Sex, Porn and Masturbation Addiction Mastery*, 7.

Stage 4: Despair

Once the discomfort dissipates, individuals suffering from sexual addiction begin to feel shame, bringing with it despair, depression, anxiety, loneliness, and self-loathing.²⁰⁵ They begin to feel powerless and unable stop the addiction cycle. Despair is the feeling of absolute hopelessness and the belief of complete powerlessness individuals suffering from addiction have about the behavior.²⁰⁶ Patrick Carnes posits, “The letdown combines the sense of failure at not having lived up to resolutions to stop with hopelessness about ever being able to stop.”²⁰⁷ Consequently, the reality individuals suffering from addiction were attempting to escape in the first-place reemerges, bringing with it shame, guilt, and defeat. Stage four spins the never-ending cycle once again to stage one, where it all takes place over and over again. Repeating the cycle builds tolerance, intensifies the behavior, and trains the brain to pursue self-defeating coping mechanism. As time passes, this cycle is transformed from a repetitive loop into a downward spiral, overly characterized by addiction, shame, and despair. Individuals suffering from sexual addiction seek to relieve their feelings of despair, finding that the best way to achieve relief is by starting the process all over again.²⁰⁸ As a consequence, they will return to the high of sexual fantasy, and the cycle will repeat again.

Numbness and Desensitization

Consequentially, the pain individuals suffering from addiction feel at the termination of the sexual cycle is habitually numbed or concealed by sexual preoccupation, which once again

²⁰⁵ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 5.

²⁰⁶ Gomez, “Sexual Addiction,” 2.

²⁰⁷ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 6.

²⁰⁸ Mark Laaser, *A L.I.F.E Recovery Guide for Men* (Lake Mary: Freedom Everyday LLC, 2013), 89.

stimulates the addiction cycle.²⁰⁹ Over time, in order to drive the focus away from their maladaptive behaviors, individuals suffering from sexual addiction begin to become emotionally distant from the behavior, blaming other people for the addiction. They begin to use coping mechanisms such as behavior justification, minimization, or rationalization.²¹⁰ Behavior justification suggests that if sexual partners of individuals suffering from sexual addiction were more appealing, kinder, or sexually available, addicts would have no need for the behavior. Behavior minimization suggests that since the behavior is concealed and is not harmful to others, then it does not pose a serious problem. Finally, behavior rationalization insinuates that achieving orgasm by pornography is not infidelity because no one else was involved in the behavior.

The Compound Effect

Another significant characteristic of the addictive cycle is its proclivity to simultaneously support multiple addictions.²¹¹ For example, overeating is one of the means to minimize distress and reduce emotional discomfort. Individuals suffering from sexual addiction who become overweight are overburdened by shame regarding body image and are impacted severely by mounting distress and emotional discomfort. The two addictions begin to reinforce each other, becoming interdependent of one another. Lisa Cohen postulates, “This system serves as an all-purpose motivation machine, active in all motivated pursuits and implicated in all disorders of reward-driven behavior (e.g., pathological gambling, binge eating, compulsive spending, sexual addiction).”²¹²

²⁰⁹ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 5.

²¹⁰ Whitehead, *Sex, Porn and Masturbation Addiction Mastery*, 7.

²¹¹ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 8.

²¹² Cohen, “Sex Addiction: The Fire Down Below,” 143.

The Unmanageability of the Sexual Cycle

The addiction cycle furthers the continuance of detrimental and undesirable negative behaviors. As a result, the four-stage addiction cycle repeats itself without restraints and gradually becomes unmanageable, ruling over every realm of the lives of individuals suffering from sexual addiction.²¹³ Their priorities, duties, and obligations become neglected and the various negative consequences make the behavior unmanageable. The sexual cycle makes it very difficult for them to control their cravings, feelings, and behaviors, causing the pursuit of sexual gratification to become more important than personal health, family, work, and recreation.

For individuals suffering from sexual addiction, the sexual experience becomes the remedy of distress, sadness, and anxiety, manifesting into a crucial source of self-nurturing, focus of energy, origin of excitement, and maintenance of emotional balance. Stephanie Antons and Brand Matthias purport, “In later stages of addictive behaviors, the reflective system may continuously lose control over the impulsive system and the specific behaviors may become habitual despite experiencing negative consequences due to the addictive behaviors.” Over time, the unmanageability leads to isolation, alienating them from family, friends, church, and other support groups. Isolation leads to faulty beliefs, misguided assumptions, and distorted values. Impaired thinking and revalidated assumptions confirm faulty beliefs, hence, leading to self-stigma and shame.

The Problem of Shame and How it Leads to Addiction

Shame and addiction are deeply interconnected, making it extremely difficult for individuals suffering from sexual addiction to realize their value and self-worth.²¹⁴ Shame is the

²¹³ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 6.

emotion or perception that a person's value and self-worth have depreciated due to a specific behavior or conduct.²¹⁵ Researchers characterize shame as an emotion that is hugely associated with a person's own sense of self-worth, while being disconnected from any interactions with other people.²¹⁶ Shame leads to isolation, as it becomes very difficult for the person to turn his or her attention to anything other than the feeling of shame. Curt Thompson writes, "The process of disintegration therefore follows a predictable, inevitable trajectory, one that begins with separation and ends in the hell of utter isolation."²¹⁷

Shame is branded as an anti-social reaction, which involves a desire to withdraw from others, a need to avoid all shame-triggering events, a tendency of increased aggression towards other people, and a proclivity to shift blame for the shame-stimulating behavior.²¹⁸ Shame can be an extremely threatening and distressing experience, provoking individuals to go to great lengths to avoid it.²¹⁹ Common shame avoidance behaviors include withdrawal, avoidance, violence, and self-harm. Additionally, common shame defensive reactions include anger, aggression, hostility, narcissism, depression, and apathy, which are all detrimental to oneself and one's social interactions. Consistent negative evaluation of oneself results in the ill-conceived notion that change is impossible because the problem is oneself.²²⁰ In turn, it leads to the avoidance of social

²¹⁴ Luoma and Kohlenberg, "Self-Stigma and Shame in Addictions," in *Mindfulness & Acceptance for Addictive Behaviors: Applying Contextual CBT to Substance Abuse & Behavioral Addictions*, Steven Hayes and Michael Levin (Oakland: Context Press, 2012), 216.

²¹⁵ Laaser, *The 7 Principles of Highly Accountable Men*, 34.

²¹⁶ Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2015), 63.

²¹⁷ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 67.

²¹⁸ Snoek et al., "Managing Shame and Guilt in Addiction," 1.

²¹⁹ Luna Dolezal, "Shame Anxiety, Stigma," 4.

²²⁰ Laaser, *The 7 Principles of Highly Accountable Men*, 34.

encounters, striving tirelessly to prevent drawing attention to one's perceived flaws, resulting in anxiety and depression.

Shame: Amplified Vulnerability to Mental Illness

Shame is a toxic emotion, resulting in addiction, depression, anxiety, self-harm, and a host of other mental health problems.²²¹ It has been substantiated that shame amplifies the vulnerability to developing an addictive behavior and intensifies the risk of relapse after recovery.²²² It can be a source of pain, suffering, and loss of amenity. Curt Thompson summarizes the effects of shame on the thought process by stating, "I am not able to think coherently, and my logical thought processes, which usually help me make good choices, are unavailable to regulate my right brain, from which all of the emotion is pouring."²²³

Shame is toxic, leading to chronic negative emotions that are extremely harmful to oneself and others. It can lead to feelings of unworthiness, devaluation, and irrelevance. It can lead to problems in forming or sustaining healthy friendships or romantic relationships. People who experience shame have difficulty being honest in interpersonal relationships, leading to isolation and loneliness. As shame-prone individuals are often inclined to having a negative view of themselves, they are more likely to experience on-going difficulties with self-esteem, anger-management, and self-regulatory strategies in general.

Shame Linked to Delays in Pursuing Therapy

Feelings of shame can linger long after amends have been made and can hinder the process of making improvements. Shame has been linked to delays in pursuing therapy,

²²¹ Luna Dolezal, "Shame Anxiety, Stigma, and Clinical Encounters," *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Encounters*, (2022): 1.

²²² Francesca Sawyer, Paul Davis, and Kate Gleeson, "Is Shame a Barrier to Sobriety? A Narrative Analysis of those in Recovery," *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy* 27, no. 1 (2020), 79.

²²³ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 67.

avoidance of clinical care, prolonged risk of deterioration, inconsistent adherence to treatment, elevated risks of health problems, and a plethora of deleterious impacts on health outcomes. Shame is an unhealthy emotion, compelling individuals to feel damaged, degraded, or dysfunctional. It is an adverse emotion often associated with hopelessness, helplessness, and failure.²²⁴ It contributes to feelings of inferiority, incompetence, and worthlessness. Petrican et al. purports, “Shame is a global, negative self-evaluation, manifest in the perception that a specific objectionable behavior signifies a defective, objectionable self.”²²⁵

Shame is a corrosive, demoralizing, and enduring emotion by which a person feels objectified, labeled, condemned, and rejected. It leads to negative self-beliefs and self-perception, causing individuals to develop undesirable opinions of themselves. Individuals suffering from shame believe that the core of their being is despicable, defective, flawed, or inadequate, setting the stage for self-directed aggression, which can be manifest through the use of addictive substances and the engagement in compulsive behaviors.²²⁶ Yeonkyeong Son, Sojung Kim, and Jong-Sun Lee postulate, “Such behavior can be understood as an attempt to avoid negative emotions induced by unpleasant conditions relevant to negative self-belief or self-awareness.”²²⁷

Consequently, the emotion of shame is associated with wrongful behaviors, leading wrongdoers to feel alone, repulsive, dirty, broken, and fundamentally worse than all others. Shame leads people to hide for fear of exposure, petrified that they will be found out for all the

²²⁴ Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi, “Reconsidering the Differences Between Shame and Guilt,” *Europe’s Journal of Psychology* 14, no. 3 (2018): 724.

²²⁵ Petrican et al., “Shame, Sexual Compulsivity,” 99.

²²⁶ Sawyer et al., “Is Shame a Barrier to Sobriety,” 79.

²²⁷ Yeonkyeong Son, Sojung Kim, and Jony-Sun Lee, “Self-Injurious Behavior in Community Youth,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 1955 (2021): 4.

terrible things they believe they are. Luna Dolezal writes, “During a shame experience, we can feel deeply and often irreparably flawed, unworthy and unloved, and that our social position and our social bonds are under threat.”²²⁸ Shame episodes provoke emotions of worthlessness and powerlessness, making efforts for self-improvement appear futile.²²⁹ As a result, it becomes necessary for the continuation in the engagement of mood repair behaviors.

Shame and Sexual Compulsivity

The nexus between feelings of shame and the persistent involvement in erotic behaviors among sexually compulsive individuals is reinforced by the immense desire to evade or hide from the idea of being exposed or negatively assessed by others.²³⁰ Since shame is most often elicited in situations where an individual’s ideals fall short of other people’s expectations, frequent shame episodes increase the proneness for sexual compulsivity among individuals requiring treatment for compulsive use of pornography. Furthermore, since sexually compulsive individuals are inclined to view their sexual partners merely as means to gain sexual gratification, it becomes likely that their engagement in erotic behaviors meets their expectation to escape the scrutiny of others and their need to alleviate unpleasantly disturbing emotions.²³¹

Shame is recognized as both a precursor and a consequence of the sexual addiction cycle.²³² Research suggests that sexual shame is the result of negative emotions associated with a

²²⁸ Dolezal, “Shame Anxiety, Stigma,” 3.

²²⁹ Petrican et al., “Shame, Sexual Compulsivity,” 99.

²³⁰ Petrican et al., “Shame, Sexual Compulsivity,” 99.

²³¹ Petrican et al., “Shame, Sexual Compulsivity,” 99.

²³² Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 5.

person's past or present sexual thoughts, behaviors, fantasies, or experiences.²³³ Variations of conditions can impact an individual's emotions of shame in complex ways. Shame invades a person's mind, altering fundamental beliefs, core values, and vital perceptions.²³⁴ In order to provide proper care for individuals suffering from shame related to pornography addiction, it is imperative for those who provide care to have an understanding of the various conditions. Although significant research on shame has been conducted over the last few decades, little attention has been given to research on shame related to pornography addiction.

Conclusion

Sexual addiction and pornography addiction share numerous similarities, both impairing important areas of functioning and disrupting behavior.²³⁵ Research exhibits that both sexual addiction and pornography addiction have been related to numerous negative characteristics, such as depression, anxiety, attention deficit disorder, personality difficulties, relationship and intimacy complications, and family conflict. Internet pornography increases the prospects of users' engagement in problematic sexual behaviors. Alex Kwee insinuates these types of addictions are consequences of the emptiness, isolation, and detachment of the human condition in a technological world that distorts the meaning and purpose for genuine love, converting healthy sexual intimacy into selfish, maladaptive, and crude attachment.²³⁶

Pornography use continues to be a controversial behavior, and the impacts of pornography use, its dependency, and treatment are areas that require further research and

²³³ Michelle Iwen, "Shame, Sexual Addiction, and Consumption in American Culture," *Sexuality and Culture* (2014): 1-2.

²³⁴ Carnes, *Out of the Shadows*, 4.

²³⁵ Short et al., "Clinicians' Beliefs, Observations, and Treatment Effectiveness," 1073.

²³⁶ Kwee, "Constructing Addiction from Experience and Context," 225.

investigation. It is extremely difficult for individuals suffering from pornography addiction to maintain sobriety, especially after many years of being immersed into the ferocious cycle of addiction. The path to recovery is lengthy and tumultuous, as they would have to navigate through strenuous and demanding roads. Oftentimes, this perplexing process is overfilled with shame and stigmatizing judgments by both oneself and other people, causing recovery to become immensely difficult.²³⁷ Consequently, a thorough understanding of the Disorder of Sexual Addiction is still in progress, as some integral components of the disorder are under investigation. They are complex, multidimensional and multifaceted, requiring much research and exploration.

²³⁷ Luoma and Kohlenberg, "Self-Stigma and Shame in Addictions," 216.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH METHODS

The biblical study and literature review indicate that excessive use of pornographic paraphernalia can lead to behavioral addiction. Behavioral addictions have similar neurological characteristics as substance addictions in that they both impact the dopamine pathways and pleasure circuitry. Pornography addiction is a consequence of hypersexuality, which possesses a plethora of complications within the addiction cycle. Addicts experiencing shame suffer from the risk of relapse, unwillingness to reach out for help, resorting to substance abuse, experiencing isolation, depression, despair. Knowing how best to manage shame is therefore an extremely important issue.

Therefore, this research will address the need for a non-shame-based therapeutic approach that incorporates integrative processes of Christian doctrine and professional counseling approaches for the treatment of pornography addiction and shame associated with its addiction. As a result, the researcher collected and analyzed data, without the use of statistics or quantification, through interviews and field notes to support the assessment. This qualitative research focuses on the impact of shame on the persistence of pornography use for sexual gratification, on the need for the concealment of the behavior, on the intensification of the use of pornography, and on the avoidance of the participation in the Sacrament of Confession within the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Coptic Orthodox Demographic

The Coptic Orthodox Church is the largest Christian denomination in the Middle East, totaling approximately 6 million believers, primarily living in Egypt.²³⁸ The Coptic Orthodox

²³⁸ Nuha Abudabbeh, "Arab Families: An Overview" in *Ethnicity & Family Therapy*, Monica McGoldrick, Joe Giordano, and Nydia Garcia-Preto (New York: The Guilford Press, 2005), 423.

Church is an apostolic and ecumenical church founded by Mark the Apostle in Egypt during the first century AD. The term Coptic is derived from the Greek word Aigyptos, which is derived from the ancient Egyptian Ha-Ka-Ptah. Since the Arab conquest in the seventh century AD, the term Coptic has been used to refer to the Christian Egyptians. The Coptic people are the indigenous descendants of the ancient Egyptians and are defined as the modern children of the Pharaohs. The ancient Egyptians were both very educated and religious people and this unique background helped them accept Christianity with eagerness, enjoying its depth through their ascetic life, meditation, and the study of Scripture. The Egyptian Church played an integral role in the defense of Christianity against heresy, becoming a stern protector of the Christian faith and its doctrine during the first three Ecumenical Councils and throughout history.

The School of Alexandria, founded by Ptolemy Soter in 323 BC, was the most prestigious educational institution in the world, becoming a unique center for brilliance in the fields of philosophy, mathematics, science, and theology.²³⁹ Tadros Malaty notes, “This school became the oldest center for sacred sciences in the history of Christianity.”²⁴⁰ This intellectual institution developed the first system of Christian theology and devised the allegorical method of Biblical exegesis.²⁴¹ The success and fame of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, encouraged the rise of similar institutions throughout the world. In this regard Iris El-Masri writes:

The school soon became the center of an intense intellectual life. The teachers who taught therein were scholars well versed in Hellenistic literature and philosophy as well as in the holy book bequeathed to the Church by the Synagogue. The students who thronged its halls were not only the catechumens and the neophytes, but were also learned men; dialecticians, rhetoricians, and

²³⁹ Iris El-Masri, *The Story of the Copts: The True Story of Christianity in Egypt, Bk. I* (Newberry Springs: St. Anthony Coptic Orthodox Monastery, 1982), 11.

²⁴⁰ Tadros Malaty, *Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church* (Alexandria: Sporting Publishing, 1993), 33.

²⁴¹ Malaty, *Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 33.

jurists, before whom it was necessary to present Christianity in the form of knowledge, research, and wisdom.²⁴²

The inception of the monastic movement began in Egypt around the year 250 AD.²⁴³ As more Christian believers sought to live fully for God, eschatological thought ignited a longing for Christ's Second Coming. On this premise, some believers preferred to live in solitude, devoting all their time to worship, prayer, and spiritual preparation for Judgement Day. Monasticism in other parts of the world was impacted by the Egyptian foundation. Christian leaders such as Benedict of Nursia, John Cassian, Evagrius Ponticus, Jerome, Rufinus, and Palladius all visited Egypt to learn the life of solitude from the Egyptian monks.²⁴⁴ Presently, there are hundreds of Coptic Monasteries throughout Egypt and in different regions of the world, having thousands of monks, nuns, and consecrated ministers living in them.

Since its inception, Christianity has always been under attack in Egypt. Martyrdom and religious persecution have plagued the Coptic Christians since Mark the Apostle was slaughtered on the streets of Egypt in the year 68 AD.²⁴⁵ However, through the various periods of persecution, until to the present day, many church and spiritual leaders devoted themselves to uplift and encourage those who were suffering and their lives were threatened by death, poverty, or enslavement.²⁴⁶ In the 1960's Coptic Christians began searching for safe havens outside of Egypt. Regarding the migration of Coptic Christians from Egypt, Esmat Gabriel writes:

Due to lack of religious freedom and restrictive government policies, Coptic Christians – the largest minority in Egypt – have experienced gradual and systemic marginalization. Islamic extremists have targeted the Coptic community

²⁴² El-Masri, *The Story of the Copts*, 13-14.

²⁴³ Malaty, *Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 52.

²⁴⁴ Malaty, *Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 57.

²⁴⁵ Malaty, *Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 19.

²⁴⁶ Malaty, *Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 28.

with hate crimes and terror. Churches and homes have been burned, young girls have been kidnapped, and even murder has become, sadly and painfully, a devastating daily occurrence. When life became unbearable, and once an opportunity presented itself, many Coptic Christians left the country of their birth.²⁴⁷

Cultural Values and Beliefs of Coptic Orthodox Christians

Family is an extremely important component of life for Egyptian people and a significant characteristic of Egyptian society.²⁴⁸ More specifically, family is the foundational structure of the Coptic Orthodox Christians identity.²⁴⁹ Egypt is a largely collectivist society where the needs of the family take precedence over the needs of the individual. Coptic Orthodox Christians view themselves as part of an extended family and community structure, where shared beliefs are valued and interdependence is preferred.²⁵⁰ Nuha Abudabbeh postulates, “Within this paradigm, what are considered to be normal individualistic pursuits according to Western values, are often regarded as selfish and are therefore discouraged.”²⁵¹ The family consists of the nuclear unit and the extended family and follows the principles of traditional family values. Esmat Gabriel refers to the Coptic Orthodox family as the domestic church and underscores importance of the family and the role of the parents by stating,

The home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctifications, and holiness. Parents are expected to cultivate a family life that is centered on Christ. Most importantly, it takes a firm marital commitment between the parents to remain faithful to each other. Through their love, support of one another, and active participation in the faith, as well as their commitment to raise their children with a love for Christ and his church, they can do it. By God’s grace, the domestic

²⁴⁷ Esmat Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United States: From the Land of the Pharaohs to the United States of America* (Meadville: Christian Faith Publishing, 2020), 23-24.

²⁴⁸ Abudabbeh, “Arab Families: An Overview,” 430.

²⁴⁹ Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 61.

²⁵⁰ Danica Hays and Bradley Erford, *Developing Multicultural Counseling Competence: A System Approach* (Boston: Pearson, 2014), 251.

²⁵¹ Abudabbeh, “Arab Families: An Overview,” 430.

church will remain forever the first place where young children experience the empowering unity, the bonding, the shining light of living the faith in their own lives.²⁵²

Church is an extension of the family and is regarded as an essential cornerstone of the Coptic Orthodox community. Danica Hays and Bradley Erford posit, “Family and community units are tight-knit, and each person has a role that is critical within those structures.”²⁵³

Traditionally, Coptic Orthodox Christians seek to reside near Coptic Orthodox Churches. When Coptic Orthodox Christians migrated to new countries, they immediately began establishing churches in areas close to their places of residence. Regarding the diaspora, Esmat Gabriel writes,

The Coptic family in the diaspora had one role: to seek the establishment of a church whenever it was possible. These families lived with the hope to again be part of the churchly life they once had in their motherland.²⁵⁴

Largely, in the United States, Coptic Orthodox churches began as Coptic families sought out for each other and started to gather in their homes for prayer and fellowship.

The sense of community that is often generated in Coptic Orthodox churches expands beyond religion to the social, psychological, and physical wellbeing of its members.²⁵⁵ The church was not only a place to worship, but it was a place to remain connected to their heritage, tradition, and culture. Coptic Orthodox priests, who are referred to as “abouna” meaning “our father,” are highly esteemed as father-figures for their parishioners. Coptic Orthodox Christians resort to their priests for counsel, guidance, and support. Regarding handling daily stressors and assistance with issues related to family life, work, and education, Coptic Orthodox Christians

²⁵² Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 61-62.

²⁵³ Hays and Erford, *Developing Multicultural Counseling Competence*, 269.

²⁵⁴ Gabriel, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church*, 63.

²⁵⁵ Hays and Erford, *Developing Multicultural Counseling Competence*, 254.

prefer to confide in their priests than seeking the help of outside counselors. In personal matters of values, religion, and family, they choose their priests to help them maintain their religious principles, cultural traits, and traditional values. Danica Hays and Bradley Erford explain, “Engaging the support of community leaders, such as religious leaders, or other trusted individuals can also serve as a powerful intervention or strategy.”²⁵⁶

Culturally, sexuality is a very personal and private matter that is seldom discussed within Coptic families. Nuha Abudabbeh insinuates that sexuality is an unmentionable subject, rarely discussed candidly between parents and children.²⁵⁷ Since the topic of sexuality is perceived as taboo, sexual behaviors is perceived as inappropriate, bringing shame to a family. As a result, oftentimes, matters related to sexuality are kept secret from the family. Privacy is extremely important as it is linked to maintaining the honor and good name of the family. This view of sexuality leads to further secrecy, shame, and addiction. The overlap of religious beliefs with the open Western ideologies of sexuality are extremely challenging for Coptic Americans.

Research Methods

The research methodology used for this project is qualitative in nature. The researcher chose the qualitative research method for this project because of its advantageous qualities. For this research project, the researcher conducted interviews and collected field notes with the intention of analyzing the data without quantification or the use of statistics. Largely, qualitative research is designed to focus on occurrences and happenings that take place in natural settings, and the data collected using the qualitative method are analyzed without the use of statistics.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Hays and Erford, *Developing Multicultural Counseling Competence*, 270.

²⁵⁷ Abudabbeh, “Arab Families: An Overview,” 430.

²⁵⁸ Sherri Jackson, *Research Methods and Statistics: A Critical Thinking Approach*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012), 86.

Typically, qualitative research occurs in the field or at the various locations where participants routinely conduct their activities. Cliff Shelton and Andrew Smith explain, “Qualitative research is ideally suited to real-world observations of complex situations involving human interactions with other people or their environment.”²⁵⁹

Generally, researchers using the qualitative method do not simplify, objectify, or quantify their observations. However, researchers are driven to interpret their data by making sense of their findings without the intention of manipulating any of the variables. Sherri Jackson underscores, “Researchers using this approach may not necessarily believe that there is a single truth to be discovered but rather that there are multiple positions or opinions that each have some degree of merit.”²⁶⁰ Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod postulate that qualitative research provides the researcher an avenue to better understand complex situation by stating:

All qualitative approaches have two things in common. First, they focus on phenomena that occur in natural settings – that is, in the “real world.” And second, they involve studying those phenomena in all their complexity. Qualitative researchers rarely try to simplify what they observe. Instead, they recognize that the issue they are studying has many dimensions and layers, and so they try to portray the issue in its multifaceted form.²⁶¹

Furthermore, the researcher chose the qualitative research method as a reliable method to investigate the existing problems of the impacts of shame on the persistence of the use of pornography for sexual gratification, on the need for the concealment of the behavior, on the intensification of the use of pornography, and on the avoidance of the participation in the Sacrament of Confession within the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Additionally, the

²⁵⁹ Cliff Shelton and Andrew Smith, “On the Qualities of Qualitative Research,” *Canadian Journal of Anesthesiology* 62 (2015): 3.

²⁶⁰ Jackson, *Research Methods and Statistics*, 86.

²⁶¹ Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 9th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2010), 95.

qualitative method allows the researcher to make assumptions and acquire information to evaluate the effectiveness of particular practices, processes, or corrective measures. The qualitative method involves observation, interviews in natural settings, and data collection in an extemporaneous manner. A research interview is a dialogue between a researcher and one or more research participants.²⁶² Sherri Jackson purports, “An interview typically involves asking questions in a face-to-face manner, and it may be conducted anywhere – at the individual’s home, on the street, or in a shopping mall.”²⁶³

Commonly, there are three variations of the interview method, which are classified as standardized interview, semi-standardized interview, or unstandardized interview.²⁶⁴ Standardized interviews are structured and follow a meticulous process, being comprised of closed questions. This style of questioning provides standardized data and rarely provides in-depth information as they do not allow the researcher to engage with any cues given by the participants. Semi-standardized interviews give the researcher more freedom, and although they follow a specific set of questions, they are usually open in nature, providing supplementary questions that may be asked to clarify or develop major points. Unstandardized interviews are the most free-form and in-depth style of questioning in which participants are encouraged to explore a small range of ideas in more detail. Cliff Shelton and Andrew Smith posit, “Increasing the depth of the data opens up the potential for new insights to emerge from the participants’ discussion, however, the researcher must possess considerable skill in order to guide the discussion without stifling the discourse or imposing personal biases.”²⁶⁵

²⁶² Shelton and Smith, “On the Qualities of Qualitative Research,” 3.

²⁶³ Jackson, *Research Methods and Statistics*, 88.

²⁶⁴ Jackson, *Research Methods and Statistics*, 89.

²⁶⁵ Shelton and Smith, “On the Qualities of Qualitative Research,” 4.

For this project, the researcher uses semi-standardized and unstandardized styles of questioning. The researcher uses a specific set of interview questions arranged to address three main concepts, which are the intensification of the use of pornography and its use for sexual gratification, on the impacts of shame on the persistence of the use of pornography, and on the need for the concealment of the behavior thus resulting in the avoidance of the participation in the Sacrament of Confession within the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Throughout the interview, the researcher uses open-ended questions to enable and empower the research participants to maneuver in whichever direction they prefer, as they provide unanticipated information for more prominent and ideal qualitative work and in-depth answers. In this regard, Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod state, “The qualitative research process is more holistic and emergent, with the specific focus, design, measurement instruments, and interpretations developing and possibly changing along the way.”²⁶⁶

Research Participants

The qualitative method involves observation, interviews in natural settings, and data collection in an extemporaneous manner. For this research project, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with 30 priests of the Coptic Orthodox Church, who administer the sacrament of confession and offer pastoral guidance within the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church. These priests were from multiple Coptic Orthodox Dioceses located throughout the East Coast of the United States: Diocese of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia, Diocese of New Jersey, and Diocese of New York and New England. The researcher collected field notes and recorded all significant and meaningful information provided by the interviewees.

²⁶⁶ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 95.

The Coptic Orthodox priests interviewed for this project are experts in their field, each with over 10 years of ministry experiences. Collectively they hold diverse advanced degrees in theology, medicine, psychology, and counseling from colleges throughout the United States and other countries of the world. They have done extensive work in colleges, clinics, schools, and various institutions including those for the emotionally disturbed. Being skilled professionally and possessing the proper training in the application of biblical tenets through academic methods, they undertake, with the approval of their superiors, the teaching of theology and psychology throughout their respective churches and diocese.

These clergymen have distinctive characteristics that enable them to perform their priestly duties and pastoral responsibilities with competence, diligence, and conviction. They participate, by virtue of their priestly office, in the unique mediation of Christ between God and his people. In this regard, Paschal Baute writes concerning the office of the priesthood:

By this pastoral office he is dedicated primarily to the religious care of those people entrusted to him, aiming to promote their personal relationship with God. The most important of this responsibility is his sacramental ministry, his preaching and his liturgical prayer, especially the Eucharistic sacrifice. But in his religious responsibility or “care of soul”, the pastor has multiple duties as educator, guide, and counselor.²⁶⁷

Coptic Orthodox priests broaden their care to the personal problems of their people, considering each member of their congregation as a child of God with an eternal destiny. The priest directs his people toward the proper dynamic orientation to an ontologically accurate system of values.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Paschal Baute, “The Place of Counseling in the Church: The Work of Pastoral Counselor,” *St. Leo College* (1966): 121.

²⁶⁸ Baute, “The Place of Counseling in the Church,” 121.

Responsibilities of Coptic Orthodox Priests

Coptic Orthodox priests have multitudinous responsibilities and crucial obligations toward those whom they serve. They serve as spiritual physicians, counselors, and guides to their people. They counsel those who are suffering and comfort those who are in distress. They console the brokenhearted and lift up those who are disheartened. They support the weak and encourage the hopeless. They teach, lead, and coach. They are aware of their own calling and submit to God's plan for their lives, and by doing so, they enable others to do likewise. They help others find their own purpose, effectively apply their strengths and values to navigate through many paths of life.²⁶⁹

Sacrament of Repentance and Confession

This qualitative research focuses on the impacts of shame on the persistence of the use of pornography for sexual gratification, on the need for the concealment of the behavior, on the intensification of the use of pornography, and on the avoidance of the participation in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession within the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Sacrament of Repentance and Confession in the Coptic Orthodox Church is administered with strict confidentiality. It is the duty of the Coptic Orthodox priest to respect the penitent's right to privacy. Coptic Orthodox priests do not share confidential information without the penitent's consent or without sound legal or ethical justification. At initiation and throughout the confessional, Coptic Orthodox priests have a duty to remind the penitent of the limitations of confidentiality. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, no personal information of penitents was gathered. The research participants were reminded of their fiduciary duty to maintain

²⁶⁹ See Chapter Five for specific ways Coptic clergy minister to people through the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession.

confidentiality, and no information about the priest, the church, or its location were documented in the research.

According to the rite of the Orthodox Church, the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is one of the seven sacraments, and is recognized as one of the four redemptive sacraments.²⁷⁰ The Coptic Orthodox Church defines repentance as the conversion of one's heart, the transformation of one's mind, and the reformation of one's soul. It involves leaving behind past sins, focusing on a renewed life with God, and lifting up one's senses from the mire of sin to the magnificence of heaven. Repentance is to forsake sin and to submit one's self to the ordinances of God. It is the pursuit for self-reconstruction, guided by one's faith in the grace and mercy of God. Regarding the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky writes:

The Mystery of Repentance and Confession is a grace-giving sacred rite in which, after the faithful offer repentance of their sins, the remission of sins is bestowed by the mercy of God through the intermediary of a pastor of the Church, in accordance with the Savior's promise. In the Mystery of Repentance, the spiritual afflictions of a man are treated, impurities of soul are removed, and a Christian, having received forgiveness of sins, again becomes innocent and sanctified, just as he came out of the waters of Baptism.

The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is comprised of three central actions, which are the offering of a faithful repentance of sin, confession of the penitent before an ordained priest of the church, and the prayer of absolution pronounced by the priest.²⁷¹ The researcher of this qualitative research hypothesizes that the Sacrament of Confession and Repentance has essential therapeutic qualities as it helps penitents become aware of their

²⁷⁰ Athanasious Al-Makari, *The Historical Rite of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession* (Cairo: Dar Nobar, 2007), 18.

²⁷¹ Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2009), 291.

sinfulness, dysfunctional behaviors, and addictions, acknowledge their need for correction and transformation, and their need.

John Thomas and Lisa Sosin underscore that Christians who utilize confession and embrace God's unconditional grace and uncontainable love report experiencing a profound sense of joy, freedom, and security.²⁷² The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession requires the disclosure of personal experiences and concerns related to problematic symptoms and addictions. During the sacrament, confessors are given the opportunity to confront their shame and to free themselves of the painful belief that God no longer loves them because of their symptoms and addictive behaviors. Confession is a grace-filled therapeutic relationship, in which God reveals his limitless love for his children. John Thomas and Lisa Sosin postulate:

Confession about the reality of one's disorder denotes coming out of denial, being motivated to recover, being interested in utilizing spirituality as a resource of treatment, and desiring to engage directly with God as part of the recovery process.²⁷³

Dealing with Known Sin

The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession promotes self-examination and self-awareness, fostering behavioral transformation and spiritual maturation. Self-examination and self-awareness are core concepts for understanding the root causes of behavioral addictions. The biblical view of sin relates to humanity's Adamic inherent inclination to sin (Rom. 5:12) and to humankind's wrongful actions and attitudes (Prov. 6:16).²⁷⁴ Although personal sin flows from humanity's sinful nature (Rom. 7:17) yet, ultimately, it is the outcome of the choices made in

²⁷² John Thomas and Lisa Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition: Equipping the Christian Counselor for the Journey*, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 449.

²⁷³ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 107.

²⁷⁴ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 107.

violation to God’s principles and laws. Therefore, identifying and confronting sin is extremely critical to overcoming it. Regarding confession of sin, John Thomas and Lisa Sosin explicate, “Unless sin is brought to light, it will grow and undermine every aspect of your life.”²⁷⁵ The first step is the confrontation of sin. People who are seeking to overcome their sin must first take significant measures to recognize and deal with their offences against God, themselves, and others. Dedicated followers of Christ, who seek to live a life of holiness, take serious steps to practice discipline and maintain a blameless conscience.²⁷⁶

Collected Data

For the sake of validity and reliability, qualitative research does not rely on a single data source, however it involves the collection of multiple forms of data, such as observation, interview, and documentation.²⁷⁷ After all the data was collected by the researcher, it was reviewed, organized into categories, and analyzed. For this research project, primary data includes (a) face-to-face interviews with priests of the Coptic Orthodox Church, who administer the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession and offer pastoral guidance within the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church, from the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia, within United States of America, and (b) field notes of any significant information observed or gathered while interviewing these individuals. Secondary data includes Biblical, theological, and academic literature that address relevant concepts, problems, and insights relating to pornography addiction and the impact of shame on treatment and recovery through pastoral counseling. Secondary data includes

²⁷⁵ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 107.

²⁷⁶ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 107.

²⁷⁷ John Creswell and Cheryl Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 43.

demographic reports on churches throughout the Diocese of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia, the Diocese of New Jersey, and the Diocese of New York and New England of the United States of America.

For this research project, all data was collected in writing, in the form of field notes, and is kept secured on the researcher's laptop. The information will be stored as electronic files that are password protected on the researcher's computer. To further protect the data, the researcher will not use cloud storage capabilities, which provide data storage on off-site servers supported by third-party providers who are responsible for hosting, managing and securing the stored data on their own infrastructure. Nancy Vyhmeister and Terry Robertson underscore the importance of taking details notes during the interview process by stating,

You may trust your memory and not write down precisely and accurately the findings. It then becomes impossible to reconstruct the information obtained. The only antidote to this problem is to set up the easiest possible way to record in an organized and orderly fashion every piece of data. The importance of clear notes or recordings cannot be overemphasized.²⁷⁸

Furthermore, in order to ensure the sacredness and confidentiality of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with the priests or their confessors will remain confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented.

In regards to confidentiality, Sherri Jackson postulates:

Subjects are also often considered at risk if their privacy is compromised. Subjects expect that researchers will protect their privacy and keep their participation in, and results from, the study confidential. In most research studies, there should be no need to tie data to individuals. Thus, in such cases, privacy and confidentiality are not issues, because the participants have anonymity.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Nancy Vyhmeister and Terry Robertson, *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 34.

²⁷⁹ Jackson, *Research Methods and Statistics*, 47.

To ensure validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the data collected, the interview was transcribed, in the form of field notes, and the participants were given the opportunity to review their statements upon request. Additionally, all quoted statements recorded in this project were documented by the researcher and are noted as mentioned by the research participants.

Consent Form

The research participants received an electronic invitation requesting their participation in the research project. The participants were informed that the research is intended for the completion of the dissertation requirements for researcher's graduation from Bethel University's doctoral program of Family and Congregation Care. The invitation noted that the interviewees were invited to participate in a study on pornography addiction and shame related problems among Coptic Orthodox Christians. The researcher clearly explained that interview information will be used as a source for data in a Doctor of Ministry dissertation. Upon their response and agreement to participate in the research, the interviewees were sent a consent form titled, "Consent Form for Research Regarding Pornography Addiction and Shame Related Problems."²⁸⁰ The consent form indicated that the researcher was seeking to learn how pornography use, abuse, and addiction impact Coptic Orthodox Christians in the regions of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia. Furthermore, the consent form explained that the research deals with the emotion of shame and the role it plays in confession-hesitancy and/or avoidance behaviors that delay or obstruct the treatment or recovery process.

The consent form underscored the measures taken to maintain the sacredness and confidentiality of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. The consent form noted that

²⁸⁰ Appendix A

interview questions are structured to guarantee the research participants' anonymity and the confidentiality of the confessors, and that no identifiable information will be required, requested, or documented. The interviews were 60 to 90 minutes long and were conducted virtually via video conferencing on Zoom meetings. The Zoom session was password protected and login codes were required for admittance into a waiting room. After the verification of the participant's identity, the participant was granted access into the meeting room for the interview. To ensure confidentiality and to protect the sacredness of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, no audio or video recordings took place during the session, however, during the interview, detailed written notes were transcribed for the purpose of accuracy in sorting, recalling, and documenting the information.

The consent form noted that since responding to questions about other peoples' shame and pornography use could make the participants uncomfortable, they were not obligated to answer any questions perceive as intrusive, distressing, or embarrassing to them or the confessors. At no time during this interview, were there be any requests for the participants to share personally identifying information about themselves or the confessors. The participants were informed that should they feel certain questions might lead to the disclosure of personal or identifiable information, they are encouraged to bring them to the researcher's attention for retraction. Furthermore, the participants were informed that at any time they choose to withdraw from this research, up to the point of the submission of data reports, they will be granted the opportunity to do so, without any risks.

IRB Approval

After a thorough review of the pre-dissertation research, this doctoral dissertation research project was approved by the IRB board of Bethel University.²⁸¹ Research projects that may involve any interaction or intervention with human subjects or may include any access to identifiable private information requires an IRB review. This project met the requirements for dissertation research and an IRB approval letter was issued to the researcher. The IRB doctoral dissertation research process began months before working with research participants. After the completion of an extensive training course, and as part of the initial research process, a CITI training certificate affiliated with Bethel University was acquired by the researcher.

Interview Questions

For the interview, the researcher designed 15 questions to serve as a guideline for the conversation. Leedy and Ormrod note, “A typical interview looks more like an informed conversation, with the participant doing most of the talking and the researcher doing most of the listening.”²⁸² In regards to the use of questions, John Thomas and Lisa Sosin suggest that questions offer several advantages, primarily providing a framework that guides the investigative process.²⁸³ For this research, the majority of the questions were open-ended to allow the research participants to formulate their own responses. Open-ended questions encourage the research participants to elaborate, eliciting as much information as possible.²⁸⁴ Typically, open-ended questions begin with words such as what, when, where, why, or how. However, there are

²⁸¹ Appendix A

²⁸² Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 146.

²⁸³ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 164.

²⁸⁴ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 165.

times when open-ended questions are not asked in the form of questions at all.²⁸⁵ According to John Thomas and Lisa Sosin, open-ended questions are best used (a) to stimulate conversation, (b) to obtain more complete answers and descriptions, (c) to encourage participants to express themselves more fully, and (d) to foster an interactive dialogue.²⁸⁶

The questions were formulated to cover three primary areas of interest for the researcher, which are (a) the impacts of shame on the persistence of the use of pornography for sexual gratification, (b) the need for the concealment of the behavior and on the avoidance of the participation in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, and (c) on the intensification of the use of pornography within the Coptic Orthodox Church communities. However, before the researcher began asking questions regarding the three primary areas of interest for the research project, the researcher asked a few questions to investigate the role of Coptic Orthodox priests as administrators of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession.

Questions on the Participants' Ministry Experience

The following questions were designed to give the researcher some information about the research participants' ministry experience:

- 1) As a Coptic Orthodox priest, how long have you been in your current role?
- 2) Tell me about your role as a priest in the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- 3) Tell me about your approach of administering the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession.
- 4) Tell me about your style of building rapport with confessors.

Questions on the Impacts of Shame on the Persistence of the Use of Pornography

The following questions were designed to investigate the impacts of shame on the persistence of the use of pornography for sexual gratification:

²⁸⁵ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 167.

²⁸⁶ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 167.

- 1) Tell me about “confession hesitancy” among Coptic Orthodox Christians and how often do you encounter “avoidance behaviors” related to members’ participation in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession.
- 2) Based on your experience, tell me about the primary reasons why Coptic Orthodox Christians may experience “confession hesitancy” and why they avoid regular participation of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession.
- 3) Tell me whether or not shame plays a role in “confession hesitancy” and whether or not it contributes to the continuation of pornography use.
- 4) Based on your experience, tell me about any additional problematic outcomes on day-to-day functionality due to shame that is related to the use of pornography.

Questions on the Need for the Concealment of the Behavior

The following questions were designed to investigate the need for the concealment of the behavior and on the avoidance of the participation in the Sacrament of Repentance and

Confession as a rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church:

- 1) Tell me about the importance of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession to the spiritual formation of members of the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- 2) Tell me about your understanding of the Sacrament of Confession and the way it ought to be practiced.
- 3) From your experience, how often do you recommend that members of the Coptic Orthodox Church see a priest for confession?

Questions on the Intensification of Pornography Use within the Coptic Orthodox Church

The following questions were designed to investigate intensification of pornography use within the Coptic Orthodox Church communities:

- 1) In Regards to pornography, approximately how often do confessors share information about their use of pornography with you?
- 2) Typically, what is the age range of those who are sharing this information with you?
- 3) Based on the number of confessions you administer, have you noticed an increase in the use of pornography among Coptic Orthodox Christians?
- 4) Based on your experience, tell me about any additional problematic outcomes on day-to-day functionality, as a result of the increased use of pornography you have noticed.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed both primary and secondary data regarding the three primary areas of interest, which are (a) the impacts of shame on the persistence of the use of pornography for sexual gratification, (b) the need for the concealment of the behavior and on the avoidance of the participation in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, and (c) on the intensification of the use of pornography within the Coptic Orthodox Church communities. After the researcher collected all data, data was reviewed, organized into categories, and deciphered. Following this, the researcher reported the interview results and data findings.

For this research project, primary data includes (a) face-to-face interviews with 30 priests of the Coptic Orthodox Church, who have over 10 years of ministry experience. These priests administer the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession and offer pastoral guidance within the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Christians in the regions of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia, of the United States of America, and (b) field notes of any significant information observed or gathered while interviewing these individuals. Secondary data includes Biblical, theological, and academic literature that address relevant concepts, problems, and insights relating to pornography addiction and the impact of shame on treatment and recovery through pastoral counseling. Secondary data includes demographic reports on churches throughout the Diocese of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia, the Diocese of New Jersey, and the Diocese of New York and New England of the United States of America.

Diocese Demographics²⁸⁷

Coptic Orthodox Church Diocese Statistics				
Diocese	Region	Parishes	Priests	Total Members
New York & New England	Connecticut Main Massachusetts New Hampshire New York Rhode Island Vermont	33	50	~ 132,000
New Jersey	New Jersey	30	60	~ 245,000
Pennsylvania & Affiliated Regions	Pennsylvania Delaware Maryland West Virginia	20	24	~ 65,000

Questions on the Participants' Ministry Experience

Each research participant had over 10 years of ministry experience. Secondary data regarding work experience suggests that a person with 10 years of experience in the workforce is considered a seasoned career professional.²⁸⁸ At this point in a person's career, a person becomes

²⁸⁷ Nihov's Worldwide Coptic Directory, "Churches," accessed December 5, 2022, <http://www.directory.nihov.org/church/usa/florida>.

²⁸⁸ Darryl Hunter, "Using Work Experience to Predict Job Performance: Do More Years Matter?" *San Francisco State University* (2017): 1.

an expert in a specific line of work, having many accomplishments that are relevant to job performance. With 10 years of work experience, this person is able to demonstrate many key skills related to the job. Regarding the way work experience impacts job performance, Darryl Hunter writes, “When organizations assess work experience, they are usually expecting it will relate to how likely the applicant will be able to handle the tasks of the job.”²⁸⁹

The Role of the Priest in the Coptic Orthodox Church

There was a consensus among the participants on the role of the Coptic Orthodox priest. Research participants spoke extensively about the role of the priest in the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Sacrament of the Priesthood is one of the Seven Sacraments of the Orthodox Church, in which a selected candidate is ordained to the ministry of the people. The ministry of the priesthood is a divine call and an invitation to do God’s work. The priest is called to minister, submitting to God’s plan for his lives. In addition to his priestly duties, such as administering the various sacraments, the priest has a pastoral role. Collectively, the research participants indicated that one of the primary responsibilities of the Coptic Orthodox priest is to serve God’s people, attending to their needs, providing pastoral care, resolving conflict, and promoting godly principles.

The research participants shared their understanding of the Orthodox priesthood by underscoring that priests play multi-faceted roles, which include leading the congregation in prayer, officiating the Liturgy of the Eucharist, solemnizing marriages, taking the confessions of the penitent, offering pastoral counseling, and providing guidance for daily living. The Coptic Orthodox priest has multitudinous responsibilities and crucial obligations toward those whom he serves. Research participants noted that priests are responsible for the spiritual formation of the

²⁸⁹ Hunter, “Using Work Experience to Predict Job Performance,” 1.

people, which is not only through teaching but by setting a good example. Priests are responsible for the salvation and eternal lives of their parishioners. Priests are spiritual guides, who are appointed to mentor and coach their people on the application of scripture in daily living and the pursuit for eternal glory.

There was a consensus among the research participants that Coptic Orthodox priests are shepherd leaders, who must fulfill their calling with faithfulness, uprightness and unpretentiousness. Shepherd leadership revolves around the person of Jesus Christ who empowers both shepherds and flock, and provides the support needed for a powerful and fruitful ministry. Many of the research participants insinuated that shepherd leaders must be committed to prayer, fasting, and studying Scripture. Priests have a responsibility to pray for their parishioners and guide them through the practices of Christian principles. At its core, shepherd leadership is underscored by a perpetual purpose that empowers the flock to progress from their current place in life to where God wants them to be. Additionally, priests assist and encourage those whom they serve to discover God's vision and purpose for their lives. Ultimately, shepherd leaders must possess worldviews, attitudes, and attributes that exhibit their belief, obedience, and reverence to Christian tenets.

Similar to the framework suggested by Crabb and Allender in their book, *Hope When You're Hurting: Answers to Four Questions Hurting People Ask*, during the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, the priest is recommended to serve three primary roles, which are prophet, shepherd, and king.²⁹⁰ For confessors to change they need to be challenged by a prophet, restored through a shepherd, and guided by a king. First, the priest fulfills the role of prophet when he challenges the confessors' complacency and proclivity to stray away from God.

²⁹⁰ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 302-304.

Second, the priest fulfills the role of shepherd when he restores people, reconciling them with God. Third, the priest fulfills the role of a king when he guides the confessor in the proper direction.

Prophet

The most distressing priestly role for most confessors drawn to the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is that of a prophet. The prophet's primary function is to confront and challenge sin. A prophet intervenes, contests, and inquires. As prophet, the priest focuses on the confessors' heart that yearns for peace, joy, and reconciliation. A prophet stirs up emotions because sin delves deep into people's souls, draining their hearts for the pursuit for wholeness. A prophet exposes and rebukes sin in a skillful way that awakens the senses. In the biblical story of King David, the prophet Nathan exposes David's sins of rape and murder by narrating a powerful parable:

Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." So, David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die. And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man" (2 Sam. 12:1-7).

The prophet Nathan uses the power of surprise. By surprising the confessors, the prophet is able to build a necessary imbalance, awakening the confessors' consciences and exposing their self-indulgent hearts. The role of the priest as a prophet encourages the confessors to seek Christ, leading them to the remembrance of God. The priest offers more than point out all the flaws in

the confessors' soul. The prophet offers hope, pointing to a new life through the grace and mercy of God. He directs the confessors' attention to the redemptive restoration of Christ. After his stern rebuke of David's sins, Nathan offers David hope, redirecting his attention to the mercy of God. Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Sam. 12:13). Although the prophet confronts sin, the utmost advantage derives from deepening people's choices.²⁹¹ Once brought into the light, people's inner desires are reinforced toward hopefulness. The prophet provides hope, courage, and optimism, leading people toward repentance, confession, and reconciliation with God through Christ.

Shepherd

The priest provides a shepherding function in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. The priest is empathetic, patient, approachable, and responsive. As a shepherd, the priest provides comfort and support, facilitating the therapeutic process. The shepherd reminds the confessors' of Christ's presence during the sacrament, guiding the process regardless of the grotesque nature of our sins. The shepherd attends to needs of the flock, demonstrating compassion, care, and concern. The shepherd participates in the confessors' struggles and seeks to deepen their faith in the power of God.

The shepherd reminds the confessors of Christ's sacrifice on their behalf, his unconditional love for his children, and his redemptive grace for the repentant. As a teacher of Scripture, the shepherd orients people to God's truth, lifting the eyes of the downfallen to the Person of Christ. As part of his intercessory work, the priest looks to God as the True Shepherd who enlivens the hearts of those who stray. The shepherd draws sinful hearts to God,

²⁹¹ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 303.

emphasizing the provision of redemption, the liberation of forgiveness, and the gift of grace. As the prophet exposes sin, the shepherd reveals beauty and goodness.

King

The third role available to the priest is that of king.²⁹² The primary responsibility of a king is to direct, lead, and guide. The king establishes structure and order, facilitating harmony, unity, and peace. One of the major priorities for a priest as a king is safety. The priest protects his confessors by grounding in reality. The priest does not own the confessors' problems and challenges yet he ensures accessibility to necessary information and adequate resources. A king does not guarantee the solution to a problem; however, he encourages people toward a path of maturity.²⁹³ Maturity and personal growth are the end results of people who are well nurtured and who have the necessities required for prosperity.

Questions on the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession

Many people tend to search for fullness and fulfilment in all the wrong places. They resort to drugs, pornography, sexual gratification, gambling, mindless consumerism, violence, self-harm and suicide, seeking to alleviate their suffering and quench their emptiness. People battle with the fast pace and rapid progressions of society. Individual physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health are negatively impacted by isolation from holy and wholesome living. The overuse and misuse of technology have led to fragmented relationships and broken families. The more iniquity is experienced in the world, the more impact it has on our society, churches, families, and ministries. Paul the apostle postulates, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). It's imperative that Christians

²⁹² Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 303.

²⁹³ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 303.

begin the transformative process by emptying their lives of matters that suffocate their desire and longing for God.

The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession enable Christians to mature in their spiritual walk with God, providing them with the knowledge and resources to deal with their current problems and better prepare for future challenges. The ultimate goal of the sacrament is to help believers become holy beings, achieving a connection with God that was previously considered unattainable. One specific way the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession can encourage spiritual maturation is by helping confessors acquire a theology of suffering. The sacrament is a one-on-one teaching session through which the priest can offer guidance on how people can use their personal suffering to experience Christ more fully. The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession provides a safe environment where biblical truths can be applied to personal and private issues, leading people to become Christ-like.

The initial step toward successful treatment is to admit that a problem exists. Meletios Webber suggests only when addicts admit that their lives are unmanageable and that they are powerless over their addiction, at this point can the healing process begin.²⁹⁴ The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is a grace-giving sacred rite that fulfills many functions, providing repentant sinners remission of sins, exhibiting the mercy of God, affording spiritual guidance, and imparting practical strategies for transformation and change. The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession furnishes the means necessary to draw sinners back to God, who is the source of empowerment and hope. Confession is not merely the process of confessing one's sins but also recognizing that God is the source of empowerment, mercy and transformation. Meletios Webber purports:

²⁹⁴ Meletios Webber, *Steps of Transformation: An Orthodox Priest Explores the Twelve Steps* (Chesterton: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2003), 83.

The course of recovery is beautiful in its simplicity, dazzlingly complex in its execution. The addict looks at his life, and admits that it is a mess. He starts toward a path of belief which (at the very least) considers that there might be a power outside his own control that can give him back what his sickness has stolen from him, and then in one desperate gesture hurls the rotten remnants of his life in God's direction, and asks him to do with them as he pleases. It is the desperation itself that becomes the prayer. It is the brokenness that brings the recovery.²⁹⁵

In his description of *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, John Ryan postulates:

St. Augustine reveals with complete candor the sins that he has committed against God. They include his long years of concubinage with the mother of Adeodatus, a shorter such association with another unnamed woman, and whatever other offenses he was guilty of due to the concupiscence of the flesh. In addition to such things, he confesses sins of pride and ambition, of frivolity and vanity, of ingratitude and damage to others, of conceit and deceit, of lying and dishonesty ... Along with his sins and errors, Augustine confesses temptations that assail him. If he is able to resist them, it is because of God's grace and not of any strength of his own ... It is a confession of sins, a confession of faith, and a confession of praise.²⁹⁶

Research Participants' Understanding of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession

There was a consensus among the research participants that the Sacrament of Confession and Repentance is one of the Redemptive Sacraments of the Orthodox Church. Redemptive Sacraments, according to the Tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church, are the sacraments required for salvation and the attainment of eternal life. These sacraments are baptism, chrismation, repentance and confession, and the eucharist. The research participants insinuated that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is a sacred mystery guided by the Holy Spirit, through the intermediary of the priest, for the forgiveness of sins. The remission of sins in an act of God's mercy. It is for people's spiritual benefit, instruction, and maturation. The sacrament is a tool for transformation, providing the means for coming back to God. Self-analysis is a primary

²⁹⁵ Webber, *Steps of Transformation*, 88-89.

²⁹⁶ John Ryan, "Introduction," in *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Augustine, of Hippo, Saint, 354-430 (New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1960), 28-29.

component of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. Prior to coming to sit with the priest, confessors ought to spend time in prayer and self-evaluation, acknowledging their sins and God's restorative mercy.

Research participants underscored that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is a mystery for alleviation. During the sacrament, penitents offload their heavy burdens, sharing with the priest secrets they are unable to share with anyone else. Through the sacrament, penitents receive guidance and receive forgiveness of sins through the absolution of the priest. The research participants emphasized that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is highly effective because it gives penitents the opportunity to offload heavy burdens, providing assurance of God's love and forgiveness. The majority of participants posited that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is underutilized and many parishioners are not taking advantage of its many benefits. The sacrament is intended for penitents to take all their sins and lay them at the feet of Christ.

Secondary data explains that all of humanity can be viewed as the lost family of God.²⁹⁷ The paradigm for understanding the miserable state of humanity is the illustrious parable of the Lost Son. The son's wastefulness leads him to poverty, and a state of impoverishment. The memory of the loving father's goodness leads the wasteful son to repentance. The forgiving father, who symbolizes God's unfading love and exceptional compassion, receives his son back into the family, granting him complete honors and privileges. While humanity transgresses the principles of God, squanders his fortune given to it, and experiences the greatest loss of being

²⁹⁷ Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015), 17.

separated from the Kingdom, Jesus came to summon human beings back to the embrace of the Father, and the security of his home.²⁹⁸

Twenty-two of the research participants offered the biblical example of the prodigal son to support their view of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. There was a consensus among the research participants that the prodigal son is a great example of self-assessment, repentance, and confession. Before returning to his father, the prodigal son assessed his situation, acknowledged his wrong doing, and realized his need for forgiveness. The young man represents every sinner who is in need of repentance and restoration. The father represents God who is always waiting for his lost children to return back to him. The research participants agreed that the parable of the prodigal son mentioned in the Gospel of Luke is a great example of the ideal confession. Confession is not merely to mention sin, receive absolution, or relieve guilt, however, it is returning home to the father.

In regards to pornography, several research participants emphasized that pornography is not the problem, but it is the symptom of a larger problem. In confession, confessors, with the help of the priest, try to identify the main causes of the symptom. As in the parable, the main problem is living outside of the father's house. The disease is that the person is away from God. Even the older son, who is a part of the system, he is in his father's house physically, but he is emotionally detached. Satan strives to keep people away from God. They further they distance themselves away from God, the weaker they become. The remedy is to come closer to God, capitalizing on the different remedies the Church provides. Much like the younger son, when he returned to the father's house, his problems were fixed.

²⁹⁸ Byrne, *The Hospitality of God*, 18.

The Way the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession Ought to be Practiced

One research participant presented three steps in which confession ought to be practiced. The first step is self-assessment, in which the confessor acknowledges the sins that need to be confessed. The second step is outlining the root causes of the problem. Finally, the third step is the remedy offered by the priest. The research participant underscored that if these steps are done correctly, the remedies will be effective and the treatment will work. Echoing these steps, research participants emphasized that those who come to confession must first compare themselves to the fullness of Christ. They should always gaze at the example Christ sets for us. They need to analyze what sins and struggles they are burdened by, addressing these concerns with their father of confession. The priest provides spiritual support, guiding the confessors in their spiritual walk and leading them to the right path.

There was a consensus among the research participants in that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is a two-part sacrament, involving both repentance and confession. Repentance is a turning back from past sins, and confession is the declaration of those sins. There was a consensus among the research participants that confessors should come prepared for the sacrament, having prayed the prayers dedicated for the sacrament and putting together a list as not to forget the sins they wish to confess. Elaborating further, other research participants emphasized that confession is one of the integral parts of self-evaluation and accountability. Ultimately, confessors who take the practice of confession more seriously experience a more practical effect and exhibit a visible growth in their lives.

The Participants' Methods of Administering the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession

It was evident that the research participants had their own styles of administering the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, but overall, there was a consensus among them that it

was necessary for the sacrament to begin with prayer. Twenty-eight research participants agreed that it is necessary to begin the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession with prayer, praying for both the confessor and the priest. Firstly, prayer is integral to growing in wisdom, attaining discernment, and knowing the will of God. One participant posited that King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, asked God for wisdom, knowledge, and discernment, and because of this noble request, God granted him his heart's desire. Regarding prayer, Jesus told his listeners to make their requests known to God that their joy may be full. He taught them to ask, to seek, and to knock, and, by doing so, he will open the doors. A research participant added that in the Orthodox Christian understanding, prayer is to stand before the throne of God. Prayer is not merely making requests but it is a relationship with God. Echoing these sentiments, another participant emphasized that prayer is a personal encounter with the King, the giver of all good things. Furthermore, another participant noted that to pray is not only to speak or utter words but through prayer one can hear the voice of God and understand his will.

Secondly, there was a consensus among the research participants that before penitents begin their confessions, it is necessary for the priest to ask about the confessors' personal welfare and wellbeing, conveying care for their personal needs. Regarding both prayer and personal care, several participants underscored that there are various prayers that can be recited with confessors before they begin. The research participants agreed that a psalm related to the time of confession, morning, midday, or evening, can be selected to be prayed before confession. One participant noted that choosing to pray a psalm before confession raises the awareness of the confessors that its always time for prayer. Additionally, prayers from the Orthodox Book of Hours can also be selected.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹ Appendix C

Thirdly, getting to the core of the confession is providing confessors the capacity to share their sins with the priest in a safe environment, without interruption, and without promoting a sense of shame that worsens their state of being. Mostly all of the research participants agreed that the idea of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is to reduce the confessors' sense of shame, giving them an opportunity to open up and discuss their problems. A research participant asserted, "I tend to listen a lot and not talk too much, allowing confessors rid themselves of everything on their chests that is hurting them." Another research participant exclaimed, "I prefer not to interrupt until the person is finished."

Regarding prayer, personal care, getting to the core of the confession, and providing guidance, one participant purported that Christ's presence is a fundamental part of the sacrament. Confessors come to the sacrament to receive healing from Christ through the priest. One research participant asserted that Christ is the one who receives the confession and through his enduring love grants the necessary healing. The priest provides the necessary guidance for the confessors spiritual formation and maturation. One participant underscored that the priest should inquire about the confessors spiritual rhythm, not to condemn them for not having a consistent spiritual rhythm but to assess their spiritual growth and progress.

There was a consensus among the research participants that one of the primary responsibilities of the priest is to help guide confessors in the right direction. One research participant noted, "I take a look at the pathology of the confessors' specific sins. I look at entry points and causes of the problems." There was a consensus among the research participants that the priest should provide suitable guidance and assign some homework until the next time he meets with confessors. It's imperative that the priest instruct confessors that should they fall, to keep their eyes set above on Jesus who gives strength, forgives sins, and removes shame.

The Participants' Styles of Building Rapport with Confessors

Regarding establishing rapport, secondary data emphasizes that rapport is foundational in formation of a pastoral relationship. John Thomas and Lisa Sosin explicate that to build rapport it is necessary for the person providing guidance to understand the major variables that lead to a productive and meaningful relationship.³⁰⁰ The pastoral relationship is critical to accomplishing purposeful work and facilitating change in the life of the confessors. One research participant noted, "Rapport is a bond that is developed between the priest and the confessor. It is a connection between the two." Another research participant purported, "Rapport happens when priests ensure confidence, trust, and care for their confessors." Regarding establishing and maintaining rapport, John Thomas and Lisa Sosin postulate that building a connection takes time. It is the responsibility of the caregiver to provide a safe environment, listen actively, and communicate empathy. For many confessors, the first confession is the most difficult one; however, as the relationship between the priest and the confessors evolves and the stronger the affiliation becomes, the more the priest is able to dive deeper into the various issues and provide adequate help and guidance. From that depth, there is growth and change. This requires a lot of trust and confidence in the priest, which is a responsibility that should never be taken lightly. Ultimately, one of the many benefits of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is the relationship between the priest and the confessors. When a priest takes time to establish rapport, it gives reassurance and encouragement to the confessors, and with time they will begin to verbalize their thoughts and feelings.

³⁰⁰ John Thomas and Lisa Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 130.

The Frequency in which the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession Should be Practiced

There was a consensus among the research participants that confession should be practiced on a regular basis. Some research participants recommended that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession should be practiced one a month, others recommended once every six weeks, while others recommended once every three months. Regardless of the different time recommendations, all of the research participants put emphasis on always making time to talk to anyone who is in need of their care. One research participant underscored, “It is not a one-size-fits-all recommendation. It is case specific. It all depends on the need.” Another participant noted, “There are some who need confession every-other-week, some need to come back monthly, and there are others who can come back every three months.” Regarding the inconsistency of the practice of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, one participant claimed, “Not confessing regularly and not having a consistent Father of Confession is only receiving symptomatic treatment. It is not long lasting.” Secondary data underscores the importance of frequent confession. Hilarion Alfeyev postulates, “The importance of frequent confession may be indicated by the fact that those who come very rarely are sometimes unable to see their sins and transgressions clearly.”³⁰¹

Confession Hesitancy and Avoidance Behaviors Related to Participation in the Sacrament

There was a consensus among the research participants that although confession is an extremely important sacrament of the Coptic Orthodox church that promotes spiritual formation, character transformation, and personal maturation yet it is often underutilized. Collectively, the research participants offered multiple reasons why many people do not practice the Sacrament of Confession and Repentance in the Coptic Orthodox Church. The first reason for confession

³⁰¹ Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to the Teaching and Spirituality of the Orthodox Church* (Yonkers: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 146.

hesitance and avoidance behaviors is the emotion of shame. One participant noted, “The number one reason for the avoidance of confession is because people don’t want to feel embarrassed. People are ashamed of their actions and want to keep them a secret.”

Another research participant reiterated, “There are lots of people who have a struggle a great deal with shame and are hesitant to come. They are worried about their image or reputation, and, therefore, are hesitant to come to confession.” Another research participant noted, “It is typical that the Middle Eastern culture struggles greatly from sexual shame, and there is an immense sense of shame around sexual behaviors.” Another research participant stated, “It’s partly due to shame or a sense of being exposed. Fear and shame are common factors.”

Secondly, there was a consensus among the research participants that repentance, as a spiritual discipline, is difficult to practice. One participant posited, “Only people who are truly serious about their spiritual lives are the ones who are eager to come to confession.” Another research participant postulated, “Some people don’t like to come to confession, because just like all spiritual practices, it is difficult to practice.” Another research participant noted, “We are called to discipleship, and discipleship is hard.” Regarding discipleship, another research participant added, “If there is no discipleship, there will always be hesitation. It is undoubtedly that discipleship is a very difficult command. Being a follower of Jesus is not an easy task. We are all called to be disciples of Christ, being always reminded to live a life of holiness. People don’t want to come to confession because they don’t want to face their sinful actions; they don’t want to face the seriousness of change. Repentance is the willingness to change. Many people don’t want to give up the things that gratify them. Others just can’t because it is simply too hard.

Thirdly, there was a consensus among the research participants regarding educating the people about the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. One research participant posited,

“Growing up, confession was not appropriately explained to me. I think it was poorly explained. Some people only associate it with wrongdoing, and therefore, there is a lot of shaming involved.” Another research participant noted, “Many people don’t truly understand the benefits of confessions.” Another research participant exclaimed, “Here in the United States, many of the Coptic Orthodox people are influenced by the different theological doctrines of the various denominations that argue against having a mediator between the confessor and God.” Another research participant urged, “Priests have to teach their church members, during their sermons and lessons, the importance and positive outcomes of the sacrament.”

The Importance of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession to Spiritual Formation

Secondary data purports that most surveys of Americans suggest that religious people most often resort to their clergy first before seeking help from professionals.³⁰² The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is a vehicle by which to help others attain the life God has intended for them to enjoy. People’s desire to become better motivates them to seek the benefits of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. Regarding the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, Michael Pomazansky postulates that the Mystery of Repentance is referred to as a spiritual medicine by which people’s spiritual burdens are remedied and their impurities of soul are eliminated.³⁰³ Christians who receive forgiveness of sin through the sacrament are once again restored and sanctified, just as when they came out of the water of Baptism. The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is a significant source of spiritual guidance founded on biblical principles. The confession of a person’s thoughts and actions before a spiritual guide has a great

³⁰² Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 46.

³⁰³ Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2009), 291.

psychological significance, especially in regards to moral upbringing, for the correction of sinful tendencies and practices, and the overcoming of faithlessness.³⁰⁴

Almost all research participants shared similar thoughts regarding the importance of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession for the spiritual formation of members of the Coptic Orthodox Church. One research participant noted, “Confession of sin leads to growth.” Another research participant purported, “It is a wonderful way to clean up our spiritual lives.” Another research participant explicated, “If everyone practices confession correctly, they will grow spiritually.” Echoing similar sentiments, another research participant posited, “If everyone trusts in the Lord and refresh their lives regularly, great things will happen and their lives will be completely different.” Consequently, the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is extremely important for the spiritual formation of confessors because sin is always advanced in darkness and promoted in secrecy. The idea of exposing one’s sin is critical and very important for transformation and stopping the sin. Mark Laaser notes that confession is an integral component of AA’s 12-step program.³⁰⁵ Similarly, one research participant noted, “AA’s 12-step addiction recovery program suggests that addicts expose their addiction to one trusted person.” If people are alone in darkness, there is no hope for them. Seeking the help of a trusted person by exposing secret sins is very helpful. It holds people accountable. It encourages change, maturation, and repentance.

³⁰⁴ Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 298.

³⁰⁵ Laaser, *The 7 Principles of Highly Accountable Men*, 18.

Questions on Pornography Use within the Coptic Orthodox Community

Frequency of Pornography Use Disclosed in Confession

Secondary data indicates that the number of people with pornography-related problems has rapidly increased and maladaptive behaviors related to pornography addiction have become more severe.³⁰⁶ According to data provided by Pornhub, a pornographic website, 92 million internet users visit the site each day, adding that 33.5 billion visits with over 207,000 pornographic videos are being watched every minute.³⁰⁷

There was a consensus among the research participants that disclosure of pornography use has increased within the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. One participant noted, “It is certainly an increasing behavior. Many people don’t see anything wrong with it.” Another research participant purported, “About 80% to 90% of confessors suffer from issues related to pornography, with an increased number in males than females.” Another research participant postulated, “Very often, pornography is a very prevalent problem with most people.” Similarly, another research participant noted, “It’s a very common confession. It’s very predominant.” One research participant strongly stated, “It is mainly a problem with younger people, even though many older people are struggling with it too. It is a problem that is only getting worse.”

Pornography is easily accessible through smart devices and computers. Everyone has a phone in their hands, even young kids who are in elementary and middle school have smart phones with unlimited access and very limited parental control. One research participant posited, “I believe the numbers are higher because not everyone wants to expose their sin to the priest.

³⁰⁶ Wendy Maltz & Larry Maltz, *The Porn Trap: The Essential Guide to Overcoming Problems Caused by Pornography* (New York: Harper Publishing, 2008), 30.

³⁰⁷ Amanda Giordano, *A Clinical Guide to Treating Behavioral Addictions: Conceptualizations, Assessments, and Clinical Strategies* (New York: Springer Publishing, 2022), 100.

They are embarrassed, ashamed, or afraid.” It is not unusual that people are very concerned about their image and reputation. They are worried about what the priest will think of them. They are worried the priest will breach confidentiality and expose them to their parents, spouses, or other church members. Ultimately, Satan wants to rob people of their purity and holiness.

Echoing similar sentiments, another research participant posited that having exposure and access to pornography from a young age makes it a very difficult battle. There was a consensus among the participants that Satan seeks to destroy men as leaders. He strives tirelessly to destroy the traditional family system and seeks to corrupt the Church. The traditional family system is the building block of society. The understanding of the traditional family is under attack. One research participant noted that Pornography is a very serious pandemic that is destroying our culture by intensifying instant gratification. One research participant added, “Our culture encourages us that if it feels good then just do it.” Ultimately, pornography is an attack on civilization.

The Age Range of Individuals Confessing Pornography Use

There was a consensus among the research participants that the age range of those using pornographic paraphernalia has drastically decreased. One research participant noted, “Unfortunately, younger and younger ages are confessing it now.” Another research participant posited, “I am hearing more confessions regarding pornography use from middle schoolers than I used to hear before.” Another research participant said, “Elementary school to older adults.” Another research participant explicated, “As early as 8 years old and as old as 80 years. I have had confessor confess pornography use as young as 8 and as old as 80.”

Additional Problematic Outcomes of Pornography on Day-to-Day Functionality

Secondary data suggests that excessive pornography use leads to compulsivity and addiction, impairing important areas of functioning and disrupting behavior.³⁰⁸ Research exhibits that pornography addiction has been related to numerous negative characteristics, such as depression, anxiety, attention deficit disorder, personality difficulties, relationship and intimacy complications, and family conflict. Internet pornography increases the prospects of users' engagement in problematic sexual behaviors. Pornography use remains to be a controversial behavior, and the impacts of pornography use, its dependency, and treatment are areas that require further research and investigation.³⁰⁹

Collectively, research participants provided a plethora of problematic outcomes that are the result of pornography use within the Coptic Orthodox community. One research participant posited, "It's enslavement to sin. The person begins seeing other people in a sinful way." Echoing similar sentiments, another research participant purported, "Church oriented people are struggling with feelings of filthiness and uncleanness. It causes degradation and shame." Another research participant postulated, "It messes up the receptors in the brain, affecting the users' ability to dream, focus, innovate, and work toward successful living." Another research participant stated, "As a result of increased use of pornography, I have seen people unable to fulfill their roles professionally, resulting in them losing their jobs."

There was a consensus among the research participants that there is an overwhelming decline in morals and values for individuals who struggle with pornography. One research

³⁰⁸ Mary Short, Chad Wetterneck, Steven Bistricky, Tim Shutter, and Tannah Chase, "Clinicians' Beliefs, Observations, and Treatment Effectiveness Regarding Clients' Sexual Addiction and Internet Pornography Use" *Community Mental Health Journal* no.52, (2016): 1072

³⁰⁹ Joshua Grubbs, Jennifer Grant, and Joel Engelman, "Self-identification as a Pornography Addict: Examining the Roles of Pornography Use, Religiousness, and Moral Incongruence" no. 25, *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 4 (2018): 269-292.

participant insinuated that the different categories of pornography encourage many immoral behaviors, such as infidelity, incest, swinging, fetishes, and promiscuity. Moreover, porn users struggle with low self-esteem, depression, poor communication skills, romantic commitment to one person, and unrealistic expectations of their romantic partners.

There was a consensus among the research participants regarding the increased cases of divorce with Coptic Orthodox marriages. One participant noted, "I have been involved in many cases of divorce because of pornography. Some men are engaging in sexual bondage, sex with minors, spending too much time trying to meet women on websites and chats." Regarding divorce, one participant added, "Lack of intimacy and erectile dysfunction are major problems that lead to divorce." Another research participant purported, "Marital conflict and distancing are common with married couples." Another research participant posited, "It has a huge impact on the husband-and-wife relationship, taking a serious toll on the marital relationship." Another research participant stated, "It is also causing tension in marriages and marital relationships. It is also impacting their ability to have children."

Furthermore, there was a consensus among the participants that pornography is breaking the unity of the family. Pornography use before marriage causes false expectations and understanding of sexual intimacy within marriage. As a consequence, within marriage, pornography causes many problems. One research participant explained that some people believe that marriage is a solution to pornography. Marriage is not a solution to pornography, as over time, users may start searching for sexual gratification from outside their marriages. A research participant noted that pornography is a major cause of infidelity.

Confirming these opinions, other research participants purported that the straining of one's senses is a draining experience, especially when accompanied by masturbation.

Pornography users suffer from isolation, many are avoiding social interactions. Presently, society encourages pornography use and engagement in masturbation. One research participant noted, “These behaviors cause lots of self-doubt, anxiety, and feelings of inferiority.” Ultimately, these behaviors strain the need for intimacy, since people who are used to fulfilling their own sexual needs lose the need for the fulfillment of their sexual urges with their partner within marriage.

Questions on Shame Due to Pornography Use within the Coptic Orthodox Community

Shame Contributes to the Continuation of Pornography Use

Secondary data insinuates that shame habitually drives its victims to hide in all the wrong places, immersing themselves in dysfunctional behaviors that intensify the damage and worsen the isolation.³¹⁰ Shame brings people to feel afraid of being criticized, condemned, judged, or rejected by others, therefore, their concealment of their behavior continues. Curt Thompson also notes that a primary characteristic of shame is hiding.³¹¹ It is either the escape into the silence of people’s own minds or the turning away from people with critical expressions or gestures. Shame leads people to veil themselves with invisibility to avoid further intensification of the emotion. Curt Thompson writes, “It is not hard to bring to mind a secret you have worked hard to keep as countermeasure against the rejection you anticipate you will have to endure should someone find out the truth about you.”³¹²

There was a consensus among the research participants that shame leads to the continuation of pornography use. One research participant noted, “Shame leads people to keep their sins secretive. As long as they are concealed, they will continue to happen without

³¹⁰ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 13.

³¹¹ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 30.

³¹² Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 30.

accountability.” Another research participant stated, “Because it is a sin that is done in secrecy, it remains secretive. Shame continues the concealment of sin.” Another research participant added, “In our study of pornography, it seems that shame is the contributing factor for the continuation of the behavior.” Another research participant purported, “Shame is the cause of the hopelessness of not being able to over the behavior, hence, leading to its continuation.” Another research participant postulated, “Absolutely, shame contributes to the continuation of the behavior. People don’t want to think about their sins. They are tired of feeling bad about themselves; therefore, they avoid self-examination.”

Additional Problematic Outcomes of Shame on Day-to-Day Functionality

Secondary data underscores that shame is a toxic emotion, resulting in addiction, depression, anxiety, self-harm, and a host of other mental health problems.³¹³ It has been substantiated that shame amplifies the vulnerability to developing an addictive behavior and intensifies the risk of relapse after recovery.³¹⁴ It can be a source of pain, suffering, and loss of amenity. Curt Thompson summarizes the effects of shame on the thought process by stating, “I am not able to think coherently, and my logical thought processes, which usually help me make good choices, are unavailable to regulate my right brain, from which all of the emotion is pouring.”³¹⁵

There was a consensus among the research participants that shame causes many problematic outcomes on daily activities. One participant noted, “Because of shame, people become withdrawn, avoiding social activities. They become isolated, and Satan uses this

³¹³ Luna Dolezal, “Shame Anxiety, Stigma, and Clinical Encounters,” *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Encounters*, (2022): 1.

³¹⁴ Francesca Sawyer, Paul Davis, and Kate Gleeson, “Is Shame a Barrier to Sobriety? A Narrative Analysis of those in Recovery,” *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy* 27, no. 1 (2020), 79.

³¹⁵ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 67.

isolation to take them further into their addiction. Another research participant posited, “Shame leads to other spiritual dysfunction, leaving the person without any defense against sin.” Another research participant purported, “Shame brings with it a lot of depression, drawing its victims away from their sources of help and their support systems. One thing that people need is to be a part of group that values them.” Furthermore, shame leads to low self-esteem, which leads people to overly perform in other areas in order to compensate for how they feel about themselves. They pour themselves into their jobs, becoming workaholics. They try to fill the gap, trying to prove to themselves and other people that they are good enough. Some people resort to hyper-religious expression, trying to justify themselves in the sight of God. They become like the Pharisees, all about ceremonialism. Because they are wounded, they feel small, they feel that they are never good enough.

Conclusion

The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is a major sacrament of the Coptic Orthodox Church that provides repentant sinners forgiveness of sins through the mediation of a Coptic Orthodox priest. The priest serves as a confidant, who offers guidance, support, and encouragement, ensuring the confidentiality of the issues presented to him by confessors. Since sin has very serious consequences which brings chaos, confusion, and disorder into the lives of those who fall victim to it, the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is established to provide a safe environment for confessors to address very personal and, oftentimes, problematic matters with a person whom they trust. Sin’s consequences are far-reaching and long-lasting, severing humanity’s relationship with God, causing spiritual death, promoting moral decay, producing divine disfavor, and fracturing social relationships. Sin leads to shame, and in turn, shame leads

to addiction. Sin possesses an enslaving power, leading to diverse addictions and maladaptive habitual behaviors.

Ultimately, shame is a major culprit in ensuring the continuation of maladaptive behaviors. Even with people who participate in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession regularly, they too are still stuck in the cycle. The priest during confession ought to provide helpful resources to complement the guidance provided during the sacrament. Confession is a source of guidance, accountability, and support. One research participant noted, “The people who don’t come to confession are alone, and that makes it hard.” Since shame is the belief that the person is bad and leading people to believe that they have become worthless and unworthy of love, The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession allows them to hear from the priest that they are not worthless in the sight of God, who sent his Son to redeem all sinners. The priest encourages the confessors to repent, be vigilant, and work hard. Consequently, there is no sin that is beyond God’s forgiveness and no addiction that is beyond God’s deliverance. True repentance is about the willingness to seek and be committed to the proper measures for change and transformation.

Similarly, as God knew David’s sin and sent Nathan the prophet to confront him, guiding him toward repentance, the priest is called to confront the confessors, leading them toward repentance and transformation. God, who does not desire the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11), wanted David’s heart to change and return from his way of sin, that he would not continue in the way of sinfulness. Although God forgave David yet David still faced the consequences of his sin. Very much like David, humanity needs more than a changed lifestyle to be made right with God. Humanity needs new hearts. Jesus died to reconcile people with God and to restore them to their original glory, leading them to the perpetual destiny in heaven.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Discussion

This chapter will address findings from three primary data sources, which are biblical-theological reflection, related literature, and field research, while describing a series of integrated conclusions. Additionally, this chapter will focus on the researcher's evaluations of the findings in regards to (a) the impacts of shame on the persistence of the use of pornography for sexual gratification, (b) the need for the concealment of the behavior and on the avoidance of the participation in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, and (c) on the intensification of the use of pornography within Coptic Orthodox Church communities. One of this chapter's chief objectives is to engage on the benefits and challenges correlated to the findings, as they relate to the practice of ministry within the Coptic Orthodox Church. In this chapter, the researcher will examine the strengths and weaknesses of the project design and implementation, suggesting possible modifications for improvement and the overall findings of the research.

The research data gathered in the previous chapter suggests a consensus among research participants that one responsibility of Coptic Orthodox priests is to strive to reduce or eliminate dysfunctional and maladaptive behaviors among parishioners by increasing the frequency of adaptive responses and reactions. Secondary data suggests that behavioral theorists underscore that all behavior, functional or dysfunctional, is learned and maintained in identical ways according to the theories of learning.³¹⁶ Behavioral dysfunction represents learned maladaptive patterns that possess a central cause or unseen motive.³¹⁷ Since dysfunctional and maladaptive

³¹⁶ Herbert Goldenberg and Irene Goldenberg, *Family Therapy: An Overview* (Belmont: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 2013), 337.

³¹⁷ Goldenberg and Goldenberg, *Family Therapy*, 337.

behavior is learned, its eradication is possible and can be replaced by new learned behavior patterns.

Behavioral theorists perceive behavior, whether public or private, as strengthened or weakened by its consequences.³¹⁸ Behaviorists believe that behaviors that are rewarded increase and behaviors that are punished decrease. Behavior alterations and modifications are the result of an individual's response to events and experiences that occur in the person's environment. Behavior analysts claim that all behavior is the result of three types of variables, biological, psychological, and environmental. Environmental variables are comprised of various components such as: parental relationships, upbringing, education, worldview, and religious affiliation. When combined with positive or negative environmental stimuli, neutral stimuli can take on the properties of the environment in which they are present, and can be conditioned to be positive or negative.

Therefore, this study suggests that it is critical for Coptic Orthodox priests to provide positive environment variables for their parishioners, affording them, through integration of Christian doctrine and scientific disciplines, proper guidance for the alteration and modification of dysfunctional and maladaptive behavior patterns, such as: persistent use of pornography for sexual gratification, intensification of pornography use over time, concealment of the behavior as a result of shame, and avoidance of participation in corrective and restorative processes provided through the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, according to the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

³¹⁸ Goldenberg and Goldenberg, *Family Therapy*, 337.

Pornography Addiction

This research underscore that pornography addiction is an addictive disorder that poses extremely serious threats to the lives and wellbeing of many people worldwide. This research emphasizes that compulsive use of pornographic paraphernalia leads to pornography addiction, which is a behavioral addiction that harms many areas of the lives of those who are addicted to it. Globally, pornography has become an extremely common recreational behavior, leading to an ever-growing body of research that focuses on the potential impacts of its compulsive use. More specifically, this research is concerned with (a) the impacts of shame on the persistence of the use of pornography for sexual gratification, (b) the need for the concealment of the behavior and on the avoidance of the participation in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, and (c) on the intensification of the use of pornography within the Coptic Orthodox Church communities.

Moreover, this research emphasizes that dissemination, accessibility, and frequent use of pornographic paraphernalia increases the possibilities of abuse, compulsivity, and addiction.³¹⁹ Additionally, the research establishes that, in the majority of cases, pornography use is initiated either as a recreational activity or as means to obtain some type of benefit or gratification such as: alleviating distress, easing sexual frustration, controlling anxiety, reducing depression, increasing energy, or improving focus. In many cases, pornography is used as a coping strategy, causing some people to become dependent on it in order to cope with day-to-day stressors and conflicts.

Furthermore, this research accentuates that problematic pornography use includes loss of control, troubles in sexual functioning, adverse outcomes for romantic relationships, negative impacts on daily operations, participation in various types of problematic behavior, and alteration

³¹⁹ Stephen Ross and Eric Peselow, "The Neurobiology of Addictive Disorders," *Journal of Clinical Neuropharmacology* 32, no.5 (2009): 270.

in the functioning of the brain. Since pornography is a supernormal stimulus, possessing exaggerated artificial amplifications of an innate instinct that intensifies qualities people find compelling and elicit, more reward pathway activations are required than natural stimuli. Therefore, pornography causes a surge of dopamine release, consolidating the neural pathways of behavior and solidifying neural connections. Consequentially, constant use of pornographic paraphernalia joined by constant dopamine release strengthen the neural networks that combine the use of pornography with reward. For these reasons, the researcher emphasizes that prevalence over pornography addiction is an extremely difficult feat, specially having been under its restrains for a long period of time.

Shame

This research underscores that shame and addiction are profoundly correlated.³²⁰ This research emphasizes that shame causes individuals who are addicted to pornography to lose awareness of their value, purpose, or self-worth. Generally, shame is the emotion or perception that a person's value, purpose, or self-worth have depreciated because of a specific undesirable behavior or conduct. The data collected emphasizes that shame is an emotion hugely associated with a person's own sense of self-worth that is disconnected from any interaction with other people.³²¹ As a result, shame leads to isolation, influencing people to turn their attention more intensely toward their undesirable behavior. This research accentuates that shame is an anti-social reaction, involving a desire to withdraw from others, a need to avoid all shame-triggering events, a tendency of increased aggression toward other people, and a proclivity to shift blame

³²⁰ Luoma and Kohlenberg, "Self-Stigma and Shame in Addictions," in *Mindfulness & Acceptance for Addictive Behaviors: Applying Contextual CBT to Substance Abuse & Behavioral Addictions*, Steven Hayes and Michael Levin (Oakland: Context Press, 2012), 216.

³²¹ Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 63.

for shame-stimulating behaviors.³²² As a result, the researcher suggests that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, according to the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church, is an excellent tool for the mitigation of shame related to pornography use, serving to counter ill-conceived notions implying that change is impossible, facilitating a positive social and pastoral encounter with a priest, and providing hope, guidance, and restoration.

Religiosity and Sexual Shame

Based on primary and secondary data, this research underscores that people who are more religiously committed suffer more severely from sexual shame than those who are nonreligious.³²³ As a result, the risk of addiction due to compulsivity is increased exponentially.³²⁴ Moralization can become extremely harmful and counterproductive to shame-prone individuals, reinforcing their emotions of shame and leading to further self-defeating behaviors.³²⁵ Based on primary and secondary research data, this project links a robust positive relationship between religiosity and shame related to pornography addiction that is mediated by a moral disapproval of the behavior. The researcher suggests that it is important for Coptic Orthodox priests to become properly equipped to provide the pastoral care needed for individuals suffering from pornography addiction, being very cautious not to resort to shame-tactics.

Furthermore, this research underscores that shame can be both a precursor and consequence of pornography use, intensification, and compulsivity. Unresolved shame can be the

³²² Snoek et al., “Managing Shame and Guilt in Addiction,” 1.

³²³ Grubbs et al., “Transgression as Addiction: Religiosity and Moral Disapproval as Predictors of Perceived Addiction to Pornography,” *Archives of Sexual Behaviors* 44 (2015): 125.

³²⁴ Grubbs et al., “Self-Identification as a Pornography Addict: Examining the Roles of Pornography Use, Religiousness, and Moral Incongruence,” *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 25 no. 4 (2018): 269.

³²⁵ Snoek et al., “Managing Shame and Guilt in Addiction,” 2.

catalyst for mental preoccupation about sex, triggering cravings for sexual gratification as a coping response. Oftentimes, shame follows sexual acting out, along with self-loathing, despair, and hopelessness. Therefore, this research underscores the importance for Coptic Orthodox priests to create environments devoid of criticism or judgment, being virtually unshockable when taking the confession of individuals who are addicted to pornography. This type of noncritical, inspirational, and supportive relationship can be transformative, corrective, and restorative for confessors encumbered by shame.

Recommendations

In the Coptic Orthodox Church, priests serve an extraordinarily essential role for the formation, guidance, and restoration of their parishioners. For this reason, this research suggests that to be able to efficiently conduct God's work, priests ought to become competent in executing their ministry duties, consistently developing and sharpening key skills in every role and function. The researcher recognizes the urgent need to propose theoretical models, identify educational programs, suggest lifestyle strategies, and include more objective measures for Coptic Orthodox priests to provide the necessary pastoral counseling and spiritual coaching for their confessors.

Based on primary and secondary data, this research suggests that Coptic Orthodox Christians preferred help, counsel, and guidance from priests within the Coptic Orthodox Church rather than from psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, or community mental health centers. Normally, Coptic Orthodox Christians identify Coptic Orthodox priests to be more trustworthy, empathetic, and accessible. For these reasons, this research offers recommendations for the revitalization of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession in order to better assist confessors and priests within the Coptic Orthodox Church to understand the impacts of shame on

the persistence of the use of pornography for sexual gratification, recognize the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession as a tool to mitigate shame-stimulating behaviors, and strategize the Sacrament of Confession and Repentance, using integrative methodologies that incorporate religious doctrine, spiritual practices, and psychosocial behavioral-cognitive protocols to overcome pornography addiction and shame-related consequences.

Based on primary and secondary data, this research insinuates that spirituality and religious beliefs are immensely valuable components in the area of rehabilitation and treatment of pornography addiction and the shame associated with it. The researcher theorizes that Christian doctrine is a critical driver of behavioral transformation, abstinence from sexual sin, and recovery from shame related outcomes. This research underscores that religiosity and spirituality enhance prosocial behaviors. Moreover, the levels of compulsive behaviors and the will to overcome addiction is dependent on the levels of spirituality and the denomination of faith. This research posits that low levels of compulsivity and addiction among religious adherers are based on religious theologies that prohibit certain behaviors. As a result, it is imperative to consider spiritual interventions in conjunction with treatment.

Consequently, this research insinuates that there is ample evidence suggesting that religiousness is associated with the termination of maladaptive compulsive behaviors. For example, 12-step programs use belief and reliance on a higher power as a method of treatment and rehabilitation. According to testimonials of participants of 12-step programs, spirituality is the primary engine that maintains sobriety.³²⁶ Religious adherers of religions that prohibit specific types of behaviors show a higher success rate for overcoming these unwanted behaviors.³²⁷ 12-step programs purport that since addicts have become powerless over their

³²⁶ Miller and Bogenschutz, "Spirituality and Addiction," 435.

addiction and that an addict's life has become unmanageable, it is necessary to resort to the care of God, who is capable of providing hope, courage, victory, and restoration.

Revitalization of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession

Based on primary and secondary data, this research underscores that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is the least practiced redemptive sacrament within the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Coptic Orthodox Church faces a serious crisis due to the significant drop in numbers of parishioners who participate in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession. Based on the data, the researcher emphasizes that the Sacrament of Confession and Repentance in the Coptic Orthodox Church is underutilized, underappreciated, and not properly understood. The researcher suggests that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession within the Coptic Orthodox Church is endangered and is under satanic attacks. Confessors, who are in need of repentance and who are afflicted by shame of sin, are being kept away from a principal source of formation, guidance, and restoration. The results of pornography addiction and the shame associated with it devastate the lives of many Christians, including Coptic Orthodox parishioners who attend church regularly. As a result, the researcher recognizes a critical need for the revitalization of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession within the Coptic Orthodox Church. Therefore, for the next steps of this project, the researcher will begin producing educational programs and strategic protocols that incorporate religious doctrine and social sciences methodologies for the revitalization of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession.

Formation of Integrated Programs

The researcher suggests an integrative strategy that incorporates religious doctrine, spiritual practices, and psychosocial behavioral-cognitive methodologies. The use and application of

³²⁷ Miller and Bogenschutz, "Spirituality and Addiction," 435.

integrative treatment methodologies, incorporating religious doctrine, spiritual practices, and psychosocial behavioral-cognitive protocols can be successful for the prevention and treatment of addiction to pornography and the shame associated with it.³²⁸ Regarding integration of theology, spirituality, and psychology, the researcher suggests that integrative counseling methods should be explored further and in more depth for counseling, mentoring, and formation within the Coptic Orthodox Church. The researcher suggests that counselors without theological education attempt to integrate may find themselves diminishing the significance of doctrine. Similarly, when Coptic Orthodox priests without psychological training attempt to integrate, they may find themselves misunderstanding the nuances of psychological science, misrepresenting the complexities of clinical applications. For this reason, the researcher suggests that the most favorable interdisciplinary integration work develops from competent priests who have formal or informal preparation in both psychology and theology.

Furthermore, the researcher suggests that pornography addiction prevention is supported through religious doctrine, spiritual practices, and psychosocial behavioral-cognitive programs. Within the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, pornography addiction prevention is encouraged through equipping confessors as they develop, transform, and prosper without dependence on maladaptive or dysfunctional behaviors. Since relapse prevention is a major part of treatment plans for pornography addiction, an integrative process is critical in helping individuals suffering from pornography addiction resist the pressures to indulge. Integrative treatment methods are helpful in supplying individuals who are suffering from pornography addiction with the tools and methods to learn the proper ways to cope with normal life stresses and control emotions, such as shame, without resorting to addictive behaviors.

³²⁸ Webber, *Steps of Transformation*, 88.

Moreover, counseling methods and strategies have been proven to provide therapeutic relief and can support individuals suffering from pornography addiction meet their treatment goals. However, the researcher suggests that counseling techniques and interventions alone will only treat the symptoms of the problems, but will not treat the problems themselves.³²⁹ Psychology without spiritual perspectives is relativistic and devoid of spiritual depth. Without the implementation of a biblical worldview that addresses the totality of humanity's dysfunctions, counseling endeavors within the Coptic Orthodox Church can become palliative.

Educating Priests Regarding Pornography Addiction and Shame

In the Coptic Orthodox Church worldwide many people resort to their priests for guidance, counsel, conflict resolution, family issues, marital problems, religious education, mentoring, and discipleship. Coptic Orthodox priests are leaders of their parishes and are renowned globally as a source of guidance and spiritual care throughout Coptic communities. For these reasons, the researcher suggests that Coptic Orthodox priests must pursue different outlets of education and personal development programs to better serve their congregations and communities.

This research suggests that Coptic orthodox priests must always seek to improve themselves in order to better assist their parishioners and to serve as better tools in the hands of God. In order for Coptic Orthodox priests to provide effective help and guidance, specifically during the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, they require a wide range of knowledge, competencies, and skills. The greater the ability of Coptic Orthodox priests to conceptualize cases and utilize the tools provided them, the greater the likelihood for transformative change to take place in the lives of their confessors. Trained priests, who properly apply effective methods, produce much success and fulfillment in the lives of their parishioners. Effective pastoral care

³²⁹ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 30.

can only be achieved through the priests' strong foundation in both biblical doctrine and psychological principles that when integrated properly meet the needs of the confessors.

This research underscores that spiritual formation is at the heart of Christian soul care, reestablishing the character of Christ within his people. In order for Coptic Orthodox priests to properly care for the souls of their confessors, they must seek to restore the well-being that has been lost. The researcher insinuates that soul caring is healing, sustaining, reconciling, and guiding people by acknowledging their humanity, and engaging in the most profoundly human aspect of their lives. The psycho-social-physical-spiritual model of care promotes efforts toward becoming whole. Normally, Coptic Orthodox priests exert a great deal of effort to help their parishioners overcome impairments and progress toward wholeness. For this reason, as Coptic Orthodox priests provide soul care, the researcher suggests that priests ought to promote care paradigms to stand alongside hurting people, uplifting them to endure and transcend circumstances that require renewal and mend broken relationships that require reconciliation.

Strategizing the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession

This research insinuates that through the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession confessors are provided guidance, support, and absolution from the priest. It is imperative that Coptic Orthodox priests know the available resources that can be used to help confessors overcome their dysfunctional behaviors. When confessors feel alone, afflicted or overwhelmed, confession integrated with social sciences strategies can be valuable in eliminating the distress, hurt, and anguish. Priests provide support for confessors, assisting them to accomplish the required change. Because priests are committed to prayer and studying Scripture, they offer prayer on behalf of their confessors, building them on the solid foundation of the Word of God. Priests empower confessors to progress from their current place in life to where God wants them

to be. They assist, encourage, and build up confessors to discover God's vision and purpose for their lives.

This research underscores that the more sin is experienced in the world, the more brokenness finds its way into people's lives, homes, and societies. Therefore, the need for trained priests, who are adequately equipped to address the countless problems and challenges confronting humanity, has never been greater. Based on primary and secondary data, the researcher emphasizes that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession within the Coptic Orthodox Church is designed to help confessors discover their inner selves, uncovering different blind areas in their lives. Through the sacrament, confessors can delve into the subconscious, exposing beliefs, attitudes, and expectations that direct their behavior.

The researcher insinuates that during the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, it is essential that Coptic Orthodox priests offer confessors an expert perspective, providing new viewpoints, deciphering behavior, and promoting the establishment of critical skills. Priests should be able to offer insight through application of foundational processes, enabling confessors to recognize how internal issues severely impact their lives. During the sacrament, priests can facilitate the confessors' examination of basic assumptions about themselves and their relationships with others. For those desiring self-awareness, a core value of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession comes from the help they receive in knowing themselves in a deeper and more realistic way.

The researcher suggests that in addition to all the important roles Coptic Orthodox priests fulfill, two essential roles must be present during the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, which are pastoral counseling and spiritual coaching. Counseling and coaching should be ongoing processes in the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Coptic Orthodox Church exerts much

time on education, guidance, counseling, coaching, mentoring, and discipleship. The researcher underscores that pastoral counselors and spiritual coaches must be qualified and devoted to guide others into increased prosperity, competence, confidence, discipline, and change.³³⁰ The ultimate goals of pastoral counseling and spiritual coaching in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession are to train and equip confessors to transition from where they are to where they need to be.

This research underscores that, at their core, pastoral counseling and spiritual coaching when used in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession assist confessors as they enlarge and grow their visions, construct and develop their confidence, unlock and direct their potential, improve and sharpen their skills, and take realistic and attainable measures toward overcoming their dysfunctional behaviors. During the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, priests walk alongside their confessors, providing knowledge, guidance, and perspectives useful for growth, development, and change. Ultimately, through the integration of Christian principles and social science resources, Coptic Orthodox priests are able to better guide their confessors throughout their life journeys, grow through their life transitions, build necessary life skills, and facilitate spiritual formation toward the attainment of Christlikeness.

Conclusion

The uniqueness of the Bible is that it always speaks the truth about people and their relationship with God. It is encouraging to learn that even the best people in the biblical record made grave mistakes and had their own share of failures, yet God in his sovereign grace was willing to forgive them, restore them, and renew his relationship with them. The biblical story of

³³⁰ Gary Collins, *Christian Coaching: Helping Others Turn Potential into Reality*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 10.

King David is a great example of God's love for humanity. David, who was referred to as a man after God's own heart, raped a married woman and murdered her husband in an attempt to conceal his sins. Ashamed of his sins, David refused to confess his crimes. When God sent Nathan the prophet to confront him, David confessed his sins and offered repentance. However, the price of David's sin of rape and adultery was severe. He spent the rest of his life in sorrow, regretting what he had done. Psalm 50 is a powerful expression of David's mental torment, regret, and shame, however, at the same time, it is a powerful expression of David's hope in God's mercy and restoration.

As mentioned in previous chapters, pornography addiction leads its victims to isolation, shame, and despair. Pornography addiction has shattered lives, destroyed careers, and broke apart families. There are many reasons why people walk down the road of compulsivity, behavioral dysfunction, and addiction. Regardless of the reasons, those who are suffering from addictions are preys to a debilitating disease, and are in need of redemption. Despite experiencing negative consequences, individuals suffering from pornography addiction lose control over their impulsive systems, causing their behavior to become habitual. Over time, the unmanageability of the behavior leads to isolation, alienating them from family, friends, church, and other support groups. Isolation leads to faulty beliefs, misguided assumptions, and distorted values. Impaired thinking and revalidated assumptions confirm faulty beliefs, hence, leading to isolation, shame, and despair.

Furthermore, the emotion of shame is an integral ideology within Christian theology, primarily associated with sin, abomination, and disgrace. Shame leads to isolation, motivating individuals suffering from addiction to lose the awareness of their value and self-worth and turning their attention solely to their undesirable behaviors. Individuals suffering from

pornography addiction and shame suffer from the proclivity to withdraw from others in an attempt to avoid all shame-triggering events, becoming aggressive towards other people while shifting blame for their shame-stimulating behaviors. The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is a grace-giving sacred rite that provides repentant sinners remission of sins, spiritual guidance, and restoration to dignity. Similar to what Jesus asked the lepers to do, the Coptic Orthodox Church asks penitents to go to the priests for absolution, guidance, and restoration.

The integration of Biblical and theological doctrines and psychosocial and clinical theories provide quintessential practical strategies for transformation and change. The researcher insinuates that both Christian theology and social sciences provide indispensable viewpoints through which pastoral caregivers can study and understand human behavior, becoming better equipped to improve human functioning and religious experience. Since the theological construct of sin in Christian doctrine is emphasized as an existential problem with dire pneumatic and biopsychosocial consequences, the researcher suggests that integration provides necessary tools for pastoral caregivers to help people overcome their sins and their negative impacts. The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession within the Coptic Orthodox Church integrated with social sciences strategies can be extremely helpful as it reconnects sinners with God, providing them practical steps to overcome their addiction and returning them to their source of empowerment and hope.

CHAPTER SEVEN: EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

The Problem

Over the last thirteen years, since my ordination as a priest in the Coptic Orthodox Church, I have been greatly blessed to be a part of a variety of ministries, both throughout the United States and throughout different parts of the world. I have the privilege of ministering alongside highly experienced and Christ-loving priests, pastors, healthcare providers, and educators from various Christian denominations. They teach me the importance of consistently sharpening my focus for a Godly vision, cultivating a genuine humility, fostering unpretentious empathy for others, learning to mature through the challenges of life, and combating spiritual lethargy.

Conversely, at the beginning of my ministry, as a young newly ordained priest, I felt an overwhelming sense of incompetence, frustration, and disappointment, arising from my lack of ministry experience, knowledge, aptitude, and ability to provide adequate help to those relying on me for guidance, wisdom, and proper application of Christian principles. I knew that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession was a religious and traditional practice that granted sinners absolution from sin, provided guidance for spiritual formation, and restored human integrity. Regrettably, as a young priest, I inaccurately and inadvertently used the Bible to shame confessors into repenting from their sins.

As a priest who administers the Sacrament of Confession and Repentance, I knew that I play an important role in helping sinners overcome their sins. I was aware that I served as a guide to repentance, formation, and restoration. However, it was easy to become self-righteous, sanctimoniously using shame tactics to shame people of their sins. My reasoning was: Jesus told the woman caught in the act of adultery to “go and sin no more” (Jn. 8:11) and told the paralytic

man at the pool of Bethesda “sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you” (Jn. 5:14). For a while, I used this approach and I am aware that it is the approach of many other priests till this day. Whether intentional or unintentional, shame tactics are often resorted to within religious communities. Many confessors have expressed a deep sense of inferiority, hopelessness, or sadness brought on by an overly strict religious upbringing and past experiences in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession.

Religion and Shame

Normally, religions possess principles, ideals, values, and beliefs that help their adherers have a clearer path to integrity, dignity, and decency. More specifically, Christians are encouraged to be perfect (Matt. 5:48), not conform themselves to the standards of the world (Rom. 12:2), turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:38), and live a life of holiness (Heb. 12:14). Unlike non-believers, Christians are challenged to live, think, and behave Christ-centrally, focusing on their eternal destiny. Largely, the Coptic Orthodox Church provides a community that supports and helps identify any threats confronting integrity, reverence, and dignity of Christ-centricity. More specifically, the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession, according to the rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church, is intended to provide a plan to efficiently overcome those threats and offer absolution from sin, liberating the soul from shame, depravity, and despair.

Undoubtedly, all people are broken. While some are more broken than others, everyone is in need of the redemptive grace of God. When people are cultivated in families with severely broken moral systems and in communities that celebrate brokenness as a virtue, creed, or lifestyle, religion can serve as a tool for manipulation and coercion. I was certainly a part of the problem. After some time, I noticed confession hesitancy among some confessors, either avoiding returning to the sacrament or avoiding discussing the sins that burdened them the most.

People's deeply rooted need to be accepted by those whom they consider worthy, important, or special, compiles a relentless impediment to conceal their unacceptable behavior and continue being burdened by their sin. I noticed also that other confessors were returning to confess repeated offenses, acknowledging that their dysfunctional behaviors were getting worse over time. After a while, it became clear to me that my approach was galvanizing their emotion of shame, leading to despair and to the continuation of their sins. Cognizant of my incompetence as a shepherd leader, soul caretaker, and mentor, I began an extensive journey of education, preparation, and training.

The Solution

Having completed a master's degree in Professional Counseling, a graduate certificate in Biblical Studies, four years of doctoral education in Family and Congregation Care, and numerous instructional seminars on various subjects, I now attain many skills required to ensure the advancement of best practices in mental health, holistic wellness, and Christian education. I am now able to skillfully integrate scientific methods and biblical principles to better help and support my congregation and many others within diverse communities. I believe that my education, training, and vocation help me empower people to take transformative steps for the betterment of their lives.

I often feel a daunting sense of empathy towards confessors as I perceive their sincere desire to overcome their sin. These are people in pursuit of victory over their harmful addictions and dysfunctional behaviors. They are trying to free themselves from heavy weights that are weighing them down and have been destroying their lives for years. I silently pray for them. I pray for their loved ones who are seriously distressed by these struggles. I pray for myself to

become more aware of the frailty of my human condition. I pray that God gives the fallen strength, courage, and wisdom to overcome their sin.

I understand that the more sin is experienced in the world, the more brokenness finds its way into people's lives, homes, and societies. Therefore, I wholeheartedly believe that the need for Christian leaders who are adequately equipped and competently trained to address the multitudinous conflicts and challenges that are confronting our society has never been greater. Pornography addiction and the shame related to it are endangering the lives of many people. Christians must begin by becoming Christ-centric and emptying their lives of all that chokes their desire for God, endeavoring to sit at the feet of the Master. As a Coptic Orthodox priest, who administers the Sacrament of Confession and Repentance, I have grown to recognize the potential for the sacrament to positively impact people's bio-psycho-social-pneumatic wellbeing.

Furthermore, it is quintessential that the administration of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession should not be conflated with healthcare overseen by professionals, neither should the role of the priest be confused with the role of a therapist or a psychologist. However, the impacts of interdisciplinary integration with the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession should be studied further to determine their combined far-reaching powerful impacts. I believe there is a strong linkage for holistic outcomes through the integration of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession with other disciplines, especially in the manner in which it is practiced in the Coptic Orthodox Church. While some Christian denominations have turned their backs entirely on confession as a sacrament of the church and other Christian denominations practice the sacrament by separating the penitent from the priest by the provision of an opaque screen, the Coptic Orthodox Church believes in the innumerable benefits of having the Sacrament of

Repentance and Confession at the core of its redemptive processes administered by a priest who is competent to provide the necessary pastoral guidance on a personal level.

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH REGARDING PORNOGRAPHY
ADDICTION AND SHAME RELATED PROBLEMS

Appendix A: Consent Form
Research Regarding Pornography Addiction and Shame Related Problems

You are invited to participate in a study on pornography addiction and shame related problems among Coptic Orthodox Christians.

I hope to learn how pornography use, abuse, and addiction impact Coptic Orthodox Christians in the regions of Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and West Virginia.

Part of this research is to interview Coptic Orthodox priests who administer the Sacrament of Confession and who provide pastoral care to their parishioner. Therefore, you were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a priest in the Coptic Orthodox Church who administers the Sacrament of Confession, provides pastoral care, and may have experience in this area of research.

The research also deals with the emotion of shame and the role it plays in confession-hesitancy and/or avoidance behaviors that delay or obstruct the treatment or recovery process.

This research is intended for the completion of the dissertation requirements for graduation from Bethel University's doctoral program of Family and Congregation Care.

If you decide to participate, I, Mina Shaheid, will ask you questions regarding your experience with penitents who are using pornography and, as a result, may be experiencing shame related problems.

The interview will include questions that are structured to guarantee your anonymity and the confidentiality of the confessors, and not clearly identifiable information will be required, requested, or documented.

The interview will be approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted over Zoom. The meeting will be password protected. For further protection, once you logon, you will be admitted into a waiting room, then after verification of your identity, I, the admin, will grant you access into the meeting room for the interview.

To ensure confidentiality and to protect the sacredness of the Sacrament of Confession, no audio or video recordings will take place during the session, however, during the interview, detailed written notes will be transcribed for the purpose of accuracy in sorting, recalling, and documenting the information.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you or your confessors will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented.

All collected information will be confidential and will be stored as electronic files that are password protected on the researcher's personal computer.

To ensure validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the data collected, the interview will be transcribed, in the form of field notes, and you will be given the opportunity to review your statements should you desire.

I understand that responding to questions about other peoples' shame and pornography use could make you uncomfortable, therefore, you are not obligated to answer any question you perceive as intrusive, distressing, or embarrassing to either you or the confessors.

At no time during this interview, will there be any requests for you to share personally identifying information about you or the confessors, and should you feel that certain questions might lead to the disclosure of personal or identifiable information, you are encouraged to bring it to the researcher's attention and it will be retracted.

Similarly, you, as a priest of the Coptic Orthodox Church are encouraged to take every measure necessary to maintain the confidentiality of your confessors by not disclosing any identifying information about them.

Furthermore, at any time you choose to withdraw from this research, up to the point of the submission of data reports, you will be granted the opportunity to do so, without any risks to you.

Your decision to withdraw from the interview or not to continue your participation will not affect your future relations with the Coptic Orthodox Church, her affiliated dioceses, or with me, as your fellow priest. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships.

This research project has been approved by my research advisor in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans.

Should you have any pertinent questions about the research and research participants' rights, or should you have any concerns about research-related issues or problems, please do not hesitate to contact me via phone or email at 347-466-0368 or frminashaheid@gmail.com or mis25598@bethel.edu.

For further information or concerns, you are also able to contact the Chair of IRB Committee of Bethel University, Dr. Peter Jankowski via phone or email at 651-638-6901 or pjankows@bethel.edu.

By completing and returning this form, you are granting consent to participate in this research.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix B: Qualitative Interview Questionnaire

Questions on the Participants' Ministry Experience

- 1) As a Coptic Orthodox priest, how long have you been in your current role?
- 2) Tell me about your role as a priest in the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- 3) Tell me about your approach of administering the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession.
- 4) Tell me about your style of building rapport with confessors.

Questions on the Impacts of Shame on the Persistence of the Use of Pornography

- 5) Tell me about "confession hesitancy" among Coptic Orthodox Christians and how often do you encounter "avoidance behaviors" related to members' participation in the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession.
- 6) Based on your experience, tell me about the primary reasons why Coptic Orthodox Christians may experience "confession hesitancy" and why they avoid regular participation of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession.
- 7) Tell me whether or not shame plays a role in "confession hesitancy" and whether or not it contributes to the continuation of pornography use.
- 8) Based on your experience, tell me about any additional problematic outcomes on day-to-day functionality due to shame that is related to the use of pornography.

Questions on the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession in the Coptic Orthodox Church

- 9) Tell me about the importance of the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession to the spiritual formation of members of the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- 10) Tell me about your understanding of the Sacrament of Confession and the way it ought to be practiced.
- 11) From your experience, how often do you recommend that members of the Coptic Orthodox Church see a priest for confession?

Questions on the Intensification of Pornography Use within the Coptic Orthodox Church

- 12) In Regards to pornography, approximately how often do confessors share information about their use of pornography with you?
- 13) Typically, what is the age range of those who are sharing this information with you?
- 14) Based on the number of confessions you administer, have you noticed an increase in the use of pornography among Coptic Orthodox Christians?
- 15) Based on your experience, tell me about any additional problematic outcomes on day-to-day functionality, as a result of the increased use of pornography you have noticed.

APPENDIX C: SELECTION OF COPTIC ORTHODOX PRAYERS

Appendix C: Selection of Coptic Orthodox Prayers

Prayer of Repentance as Written in the Book of Hours of the Coptic Orthodox Church³³¹

My Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, treasure of mercy and spring of salvation, I come to You confessing my sins. I confess that, insolently, I dared to defile your holy sanctuary with my sins. Now I seek your mercy and love, for your mercy is boundless. You never turn back a sinner who comes back to You. I confess that my mind is burdened with sin and that I have no strength left. Do not turn away from me, do not rebuke me in Your anger nor chasten me in your displeasure. I am worn out. Have compassion upon me. Lord, do not judge me in your justice but according to your mercy. Remember your creation, do not put me on trial, because none of your servants can justify their deeds. Dress me in a new attire that befits your glory. Forgive my sins and I shall sing; “Blessed is he whose sins are forgiven.” When I confess my sins, and reveal my iniquities, you cleanse them. Amen.

Prayer Before Confession

O holy Father, who awaits the return of sinners, you gave your promise that you are ready to accept those who repent. Look now to a soul that was lost in the valleys of disobedience. For a long time, I have tasted the bitterness of misery, being away from the stream of salvation. Now I come back to you to be purified. Accept me and do not reject me. For when you look at me with mercy and compassion, I will be cleansed and saved. If you turn away from me, I shall perish. Strengthen my will to come closer to you in faith and hope. Give me the courage to confess my sins and detest returning to them. May your Holy Spirit remind me not to stray once again. Enlighten my heart that I can see the seriousness of my sins and negligence, and to have the will to obey your commandments and live for the Glory of your holy name. Amen.

Prayer After Confession

O holy Father, I am grateful for Your goodness and love for mankind. You did not wish that I perish, but awakened me from my slothfulness and guided me to your path. You saved me from the valley of death and brought me to the protection of your strong fortress. Fill me with hope and faith. I come to you like the sick, wishing to be healed. I come hungry for your goodness, seeking to be filled. I come thirsty for your righteousness, seeking to be quenched from the springs of living water. I come, as a poor person, to the source of riches and abundance. I come as a sinner in pursuit of redemption. I come seeking restoration and renewal of life. You are my salvation, my health, my life, and my strength. Through you, I find consolation, joy, and comfort. Help me, protect me, and surround me with your goodness. Teach me to put my will in your hands and live according to your will. Remove my weakness so I may be firm and faithful to you unto the end. Amen.

³³¹ The Book of Hours is primarily used by the Coptic Orthodox Church, containing prayers for seven different hours to be recited throughout the day. The hours are chronologically laid out, each containing a theme that corresponds to events in the life of Jesus Christ. Additionally, the Book of Hours contains other valuable prayers, such as the Prayer of Repentance, Prayer Before Confession, and the Prayer After Confession.

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