

Title: The P*rn Antidote
Author: Carl Stewart
Pages: 123
Book Review by Allen Dvorak

The author, Carl Stewart, is a licensed counselor whose private practice primarily involves men/couples who struggle with pornography. He lives near me in the Huntsville, Alabama area (although I have never met him).

Like others who write or speak about the problem of pornography, Stewart begins by noting the extent of the problem. Among cities deemed to be the “most religious” according to census data, Huntsville, AL is the #1 user of pornography per capita (p. 8). He also subscribes (as do I) to the idea that pornography can create a chemical addiction in those who use it.

Stewart describes what he calls “the three brains.” They are actually parts of the human brain that serve different functions. The prefrontal cortex is the “thinking brain.” “The thinking brain processes cause and effect, goals, morals, and values. It helps us apply what we have learned from our past experiences” (p. 17). The limbic system, including the amygdala, is the “feeling brain.” This is the part of the brain that processes emotions, relationships, and sex. He notes that this part of the brain is 2x larger in men than in women, while “the part of the brain responsible for processing relationships is twice as large as the male counterpart” (p. 18). The “body brain” is the brain stem and controls our autonomic body functions.

The purpose of his discussion of the “three brains” is to describe how each of them reacts when a person views pornography. The relationship between the three brains serves to explain in part the difficulty that individuals have in giving up pornography.

Stewart then dives deeper into the emotional causes of pornography. Consider these quotes:

“Pornography, lust, and acting out are processes that help mask and override emotions that seem overwhelming or out of control” (p. 41).

“Sadness and loss are powerful emotional states that easily lead to escaping into the porn portal” (p. 44).

“In my experience, there are three emotions that we cannot tolerate. We will do anything to get away from them. I call them the Devil’s Triangle: HELPLESS, HOPELESS, and WORTHLESS. When I talk with guys and couples, these are typically the basis of their strongest emotional reactions” (p. 46).

“Research shows that the best predictor for any type of addictive behavior is a history of abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual)” (p. 47).

“Neglect is the silent killer. While abuse is the best predictor of any type of addictive, neglect is the best predictor of how persistent that behavior is” (p. 49).

Spoiler alert: Stewart identifies “attachment” as the antidote to pornography (quote on page 57), suggesting that our brains are “wired” for attachment. He discusses an individual’s need for attachment with other people and with Christ (“If attachment is the antidote for sexual addiction, then attachment with Christ is the ultimate antidote”). In chapter seven, he argues that pornography is “counterfeit attachment.”

His discussion of the effect that a husband’s use of pornography has on his wife and how he needs to respond would be particularly helpful for couples.

Stewart’s book is easy reading. I don’t know if he is a member of the church, but I don’t remember any statement that I thought was clearly anti-biblical.

The chapter titles are:

1. Porn Is An Epidemic
2. The Three Brains
3. Emotions Managed By Porn
4. The Logic Of Emotions
5. Attachment – The Secret Ingredient
6. Attachment And Regulation
7. Porn: Counterfeit Attachment
8. Connecting With Christ – The Ultimate Antidote
9. Caught Red-handed – Her World Falls Apart
10. Spilling The Beans – All Of Them
11. Recovery For Him, Her, And The Marriage

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