

TRANSCRIPT

An Undeceptions podcast.

John Dickson:

Just a note front, we're talking about pornography in this episode, and also sexual abuse.

Speaker 2:

[foreign language 00:00:18].

John Dickson:

That's the sound of 70,000 Korean women protesting an alarming rise in pornographic videos made from spy cams placed in public bathrooms and change rooms.

Speaker 2:

[foreign language 00:00:33].

John Dickson:

But for every voice decrying the evils of pornography there's another that says it's healthy, part of our freedom of expression, it's sex positive. The first big case was back in the 1980s when people tried to shut down Hustler magazine, and Hustler fought back. That's the basis of the film *The People vs. Larry Flynt*.

Edward Norton:

I am not trying to convince you that you should like what Larry Flynt does, I don't like what Larry Flynt does, but what I do like is that I live in a country where you and I can make that decision for ourselves. We live in a free country, and that is a powerful idea, that's a magnificent way to live. But there is a price for that freedom, which is that sometimes we have to tolerate things that we don't necessarily like. So go back in that room where you are free to think whatever you want to think about Larry Flynt and Hustler magazine, but then ask yourselves if you want to make that decision for the rest of us. Because the freedom that everyone in this room enjoys is in a very real way in your hands, and if we start throwing up walls against what some of us think is obscene, we may very well wake up one morning and realize that walls have been thrown up in all kinds of places that we never expected.

John Dickson:

Is pornography a question of individual freedom of expression, or is it a profound injustice, or perhaps both?

Melinda Tankard Reist:

I mean, the things that girls are telling me, they're telling me younger, indicating the sexual stunting of an entire generation. These boys are watching essentially show reels of abuse, and then they're wanting to enact on girls what they've seen.

John Dickson:

Pornography, an expression of evil, or a matter of personal taste? A detriment to society, or a means of fulfillment? I'm John Dickson, and this is Undeceptions. Undeceptions is brought to you by Zondervan Academic's new commentary on the Book of Exodus by Christopher Wright. I love that guy. Every episode at Undeceptions we explore some aspect of life, faith, history, culture, or ethics that's either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten. With the help of people who know what they're talking about, we'll be trying to undecieve ourselves and let the truth out.

Speaker 4:

MasterCard said on Sunday it was investigating allegations against pornhub.com after a New York Times opinion piece said many videos posted on the adult website depicted child sexual abuse.

John Dickson:

On December 4th, 2020, a New York Times opinion piece titled The Children of Pornhub put the world's biggest porn distributor on notice. The author, Nicholas Kristof, detailed the disturbing proliferation of harmful videos on the site, videos made at the expense of trafficked and abused girls. In response, MasterCard and Visa announced they would conduct independent investigations into their relationships with Pornhub, and subsequently announced they would cease processing payments for the porn giant. This was a real hit for Pornhub and a victory for grassroots campaigns like Collective Shout, who've been publicizing Pornhub's practices for years.

Melinda Tankard Reist:

Well, I would describe Pornhub as really the mother of all porn dispensers. It's the largest porn hosting platform in the world, and tragically popular with teenage boys.

John Dickson:

That's Melinda Tankard Reist. She's an author, media commentator, and advocate for women and girls. For years she and her team have confronted sexualization, objectification, the harms of pornography, sexual exploitation, trafficking, and violence against women. She's the author of six books, including Big Porn Inc: Exposing the Harms of the Global Porn Industry. Melinda has no love for Pornhub.

Melinda Tankard Reist:

It's genres include some of the most violent content you could ever see, but perhaps just take my word for it, sadism porn, rape porn, incest themes, teen, barely legal, it's become increasingly brutalized and callous. It presents women as existing for male gratification, but increasingly violent and sadistic. And we're part of a global campaign against Pornhub that was started by a colleague of ours at Exodus Cry,

and there's been a remarkable response, 2 million signatures to a globalchange.org petition exposing the trafficking of girls, exposing rape content, exposing videos filmed without consent, including videos of underage girls, exposing the extreme racism on Pornhub. Here you have Pornhub supporting Black Lives Matter, at the same time eroticizing historic racist tropes. You have genres of slavery porn, you have genres of Nazi porn, of Jewish women being violated in places depicting concentration camps.

We say, how is it possible you can have a global outcry against racism, and justly so, at the same time Pornhub, which is owned by Mindgeek, which has its headquarters in Canada, allows all of this, not only allows it, but facilitates it and promotes it, harmful ideas, normalizing and sexualizing extreme violence against women. We talk a lot about respectful relationships, we talk a lot about consent. We've had the Me Too and It's Time campaigns, but a platform like Pornhub is undermining those campaigns, it's eroticizing cruelty and degradation and the submission of women. The research tells us that pornography contributes to harmful attitudes, it contributes to young men being more tolerant of sexual harassment and sexual violence. The research says that this type of porn desensitizes men and boys to sexual cruelty. Now at a time when we have an epidemic of violence against women, why does Pornhub get a free pass to profit from the extreme suffering of women and girls around the world?

John Dickson:

The decision by Visa and MasterCard to stop processing payments to Pornhub certainly is good news to Melinda, but she reckons the fight is far from over. The battle continues in our schools and unis, in corporations, among our elected officials, and in our homes, as well as in our brains, there's a bit of research on the effect of porn on the brain, and the evidence is mixed

A study by the Australian Research Center in sex health and society said it found that pornography enabled sexual confidence and positive community formation, especially for LGBT people. However, a 2007 study published in the American Journal of Medicine found that the sex lives of 18 million men over aged 20 were negatively affected due to excessive porn viewing. Then there's a recent study by the Kinsey Institute, yes, I know the history of the eponymous Alfred Kinsey. Google it if you don't. It showed that people who use technology for sexting or webcamming gained a sense of emotional connection, as well as sexual gratification from this contact. But in a study conducted at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, researchers discovered a significant association between reported pornography hours per week and gray matter volume in the human brain, and a dropped in reactivity to sexual cues.

And here's a line ball, a study published in the Archives of Sexual Behavior looking at Norwegian use of pornography found that couples who use pornography together tended to enjoy a more permissive erotic climate, but where only one person in the couple did, men who used porn were likely to experience problems with arousal, and women who used porn were likely to have increased negative self-perceptions.

Bill Struthers:

Back in the 2000s people hadn't really thought about pornography as something that could potentially become addictive, so what I wanted to do in the book is to actually unpack what pornography does when a person looks at it from a neurological perspective,

John Dickson:

That's Bill Struthers, a Neuroscientist and Professor of Psychology at Wheaton College in the United States. He's also the author of *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*, and he tells me that when he was researching his book in 2010 the buzzword was addiction.

Bill Struthers:

And then at the time there was a lot of concern about whether or not it was addictive or not, and so basically what I wanted to do is then throw a sex gender dimension to it and say, why are so many men looking at porn? And one of the things that I wrote about in the book was that I think it actually has something to do with the way that men are wired neurologically to be on the lookout for those kinds of signals, and so it impacts men in a way that I think is very profound.

John Dickson:

Can you talk me through that process of pornography hijacking? That's the word.

Bill Struthers:

Well, I think that it's important to stop and step back and think about the human being, the people who want to get caught up in sex as if it's all about the genitals. But actually, as a neuroscientist, I think that the most significant sexual organ that you have between your ears, not between your legs. And so when we look at the nervous system and how it's coordinating everything that we do, certainly our sexual behavior is something that's it's going to be overseeing, it's going to be involved in. So when the baby is born, they don't come out ready to mate. They actually go through a period of development, and then around the time of puberty, which is really the way that most cultures distinguish between being an adult and being a child, is when you're now ready to mate, so to speak.

And so there's something going on in the brain that these regions, perhaps they've been lying dormant, or they're being reorganized, or whatever it is that's going on, and there's a lot of science behind that, and that's maybe something that would be for another time, but these systems become live, they become active. So there's a neurological dimension to the way that we think about our sexuality, not just about our motivations, about the reasons why we do it, but the things that we look for, and then when we're activated, do we respond in such a way? Do we see that attractive person who really sexually arouses us and do we roll the dice, so to speak, do we go and see if they're interested in us or not? And if they are, then how does that play itself out, and do we actually go home with each other, so to speak.

So for me as a neuroscientist, that's really what I'm interested in. And so pornography now hijacks that whole system, that embodied real world system where you're a sexual creature that's embedded in this dance of embodied people trying to figure each other out, whether you're attracted to each other, or whether you want to invest in that relationship or not, now you don't have to do any of that.

John Dickson:

Simon encountered pornography near the beginning of the online revolution.

Simon:

For me, I was in that generation of people who was a teenager as the internet was coming to the world, which was a really unique time, and people didn't really know what the internet would bring. And so one of the things that the internet brought was this tsunami of pornography, and made it accessible to everyone. And so I remember when I went to uni, which was, I was 19, and there were computer rooms, and back then computer rooms were not, this is '97, they weren't monitored, they were just this new thing. And so I really just, I started looking at whether porn was actually that easy to find, I'd heard that it was, and so it was actually just that morbid curiosity about, is it really that easy to find? Is it really there? And then when I stumbled upon it I didn't realize how powerful an impact it would have on me, that it wasn't just something I could go, oh yeah, that's there, and then leave it, but that it drew me back to it time and time again.

John Dickson:

Can you describe that? I mean, are we talking 10 minutes a day you would look at it, or an hour a day? How much in your life was this?

Simon:

There were times where you would just look for hours and hours, and you'd think at the end of it how stupid it was to do such a thing, you'd go, where on earth has the time gone and why on earth did I do that? And it definitely wasn't satisfying like eating a big meal going, well I've had my fill and I don't need anymore, it was emptying at the same time as gluttony.

John Dickson:

Simon would say that his connection to pornography in those days boarded on an addiction. Professor Struthers says that's a concept that's hotly debated by researchers.

Bill Struthers:

Yeah, I think since I've been doing research on this now for going on 15 years, I found that a lot of the language of addiction, addiction was really the term that people grabbed onto in the late 90s and the early 2000s, I think a lot of that is down to the technology that was available at the time. In the late 90s, early 2000s, people were beginning to get broadband internet, and people were really being able to get lots of pictures or moving pictures, clips and movies. And so what happened was that adults who could get access to this material were now finding that it was really easy to just watch porn and to sexually act out to it, to masturbate to it, and they found that was something that they could do whenever they wanted to.

And so for many individuals what happened is the normal safeguards that were in place of not going out and being able to grab porn wherever you wanted to, or the social awkwardness of going to the store where the magazines were sold, that was taken away. And so for a lot of those individuals what happened is it was like being a kid in a candy store, they just went nuts, so to speak, and they watched all kinds of stuff, and what happened is that it developed for them in what I think is fair to call an addictive pattern of behavior.

And so in the early 2000s the language of addiction became very common, and when you would take 20 year olds, or 30 year olds, or people who were addicted to pornography, using that terminology, or you'd put them in a MRI and you'd show them pictures of naked people, that all of the regions that are involved in normal sex, the hypothalamus, amygdala, ventral media striatum, these regions would light up, and we know from studies on drug abusers and drug addicts that these are the same regions. So it seemed really logical for addiction to be the language that people used because most of the people who were really upset about it were self diagnosing, they're being diagnosed, you looked at their brain activity and lo and behold, hey, it looks like a drug addict, it's probably an addiction.

John Dickson:

Seems simple enough, but it gets more complicated when researchers consider the different generations and different types of pornography.

Bill Struthers:

Now keep in mind this is the early 2000s. What I've noticed then in the time since then is that as people became more interested in it, and as we started thinking about this as a neurological issue, rather than maybe a moral or a spiritual issue, that now researchers came and they started doing research on people who were maybe normals, or non-addicts, and they're thinking, well, what's going on here? And so they started looking at 20, 30 year olds in 2009, 2010, 2015. Well, these are different people, these are actually not the people in the late 90s and early 2000s who were in their thirties and forties and now becoming addicts, these are actually kids who were raised and went through puberty when the broadband porn became available.

So this is a whole different crew that we're working with, and so this is a crew that's actually neurologically sexually coming of age now with this material present. They grew up having pornography more as sex ed, and rather than pornography being like a crack cocaine, or a heroin that they became addicted to, I think it's fair to say that pornography for them became their education, but also their ibuprofen. It became the way that they dealt with all kinds of other anxieties and things, that they moved into this space where easy access to pornography meant that hey, if I had a bad day at school I can just log in and look at some porn and to it, and I can just then wake up the next day and it's not a big deal. So it wasn't a heroin addiction, it's not like a pornography addiction, it's more self medication, it's more self soothing for a lot of the people from that millennial generation.

John Dickson:

Can you talk me through some of the negative consequences?

Bill Struthers:

Pornography can cause stress, it can cause anxiety, it can be used in such a way where it becomes an obsession for the people who are addicts, the people who would fit that addict narrative, for a lack of a better way of putting it. But I think what happens is for people who really become preoccupied with pornography is that it really does serve as a distraction for them. Everything becomes about sex, and so it spills over into the other parts of their lives, where normal sex with their spouse, that doesn't have all the

richness of the multiple images, the multiple positions, the variety, all that fun stuff that they have at the keyboard, real person is just bad porn, so to speak.

John Dickson:

For Simon pornography was becoming a serious problem, for cultural reasons as much as neurological ones. Simon is a Christian, and like many Christians he saw the struggle against pornography in a very different light. It was a sin in a category all of its own, he felt. What made it more difficult was that Simon was a youth minister in his church, and he didn't feel he could share his struggle with anyone.

Simon:

Yeah, I think I had the wrong belief that a Christian shouldn't, or doesn't struggle with this, that a Christian couldn't, and so for me to be captured by this created a real fracture in my spiritual walk. And so it's something I felt like I had to keep hidden, or if it ever was talked about it had to be something that I was on top of and fighting. I couldn't actually admit to myself that this was something that there was a part of me that loved, and a part of me that hated it, where I knew I had to fight it, but I couldn't admit that to anyone, and I was wearing this, I think of it as like wearing this mask that I had to hold up, and it was really sad that I felt like I had to do that even to my best friend and my wife at the time, that I couldn't be honest with her.

And I met many guys over the years who have just gone, "No, I need to be honest," and they pour out their heart, either to a friend, or to a pastor, or to their loved ones, but for me, it was always something I couldn't share, I was so worried about how people would be disgusted by me. And I think a lot of people, especially in that season, and I know it's still true today, but in that season, no one really expected that people would be struggling with porn. It was a thing that you did on the side with the internet, there was so many people struggling with it and no one was talking about it. And whereas now I think it's more talked about, it's still a secret sin for a lot of people, but it's more, if someone brings it up it's not a big surprise that people are struggling with it, whereas I think in those times it was still so new that it was such a, not pornography was new, but it being unleashed on everyone.

So yeah, so I didn't share it with anyone, and that was a real, I'm not excusing that or seeking sympathy, but it was a huge burden.

Bill Struthers:

I would probably argue that people with a sincere faith that actually do see viewing pornography as a taboo are, in truth, more at risk, because what happens is when you violate the taboo it's going to actually create a bodily distress, a bodily anxiety, and that bodily anxiety can ramp people up to actually have a more robust sexual response when they do act out to it. Now after that, however, the guilt that comes with that taboo violation in many ways can derive the shame that the person will then try to deal with the shame by going back to the sexual release and use the porn for the sexual release, so they get caught in this spiral. So a lot of the early stories about the sex addicts are people who were presumably very moralistic, people who were very devout believers, or very religious and felt horribly shamed about this, recognizing that the shame was actually making the problem worse for them.

Simon:

The idea was that I was just going to repent, say no to this sin, fight it, and plug on and grip my teeth, and not realizing how much of a grip it had on me. I obviously was thinking about doing it, and then dabbling back into it, and then got back into it as a habit. But there would be these seasons of me fighting and then slipping back into it, until the third time that it really blew up my wife said, "That's enough," and she asked me to leave. And so I got kicked out over this issue, which when that happens you no longer can just put on a brave face and go, oh well, I guess I'll just try again, you realize this is actually really serious and you have to, then your friends find out and your parents find out and people at church find out, and that sort of thing.

And so that was when it all really exploded and I realized I actually need help, I actually can't fight this on my own, I can't do this just by gritting my teeth and saying no, this thing has a bigger hold on me than I thought.

John Dickson:

That realization was 15 years ago. Thankfully Simon eventually found support in a group of Christians, and it was a safe harbor. Professor Bill Struthers says that parts of Simon's story, particularly the shame and anxiety around porn, are, for better or worse, becoming less common.

Bill Struthers:

So many people actually just don't see it as a problem at all, they don't feel bad, they don't feel guilty about it when they do it. I think that's just a different problem, I think now getting rid of the high ceiling that the person might have, their high view of sex is just no, we're just animals, this is just what animals do, I think they sell sex really short in that way.

John Dickson:

I know it's very common in pop culture to accuse Christians and their Bible of being anti-sex, having such a low view of it that it all has to be banned. This is a plain reversal of the truth. It's the Bible that sees sex as precious, and it's porn that diminishes sex. In the Bible sex is viewed as a psychosomatic soul and body encounter between two people in which the two become one flesh, to use the biblical expression. In porn sex is, by definition, reduced to one person's bodily function. You don't really need a moral framework for bodily functions like sneezing, scratching yourself, or going to the toilet. But for precious things you do need a framework.

It's a bit like the rules in the Dickson home around my precious handmade Taylor Guitar. The instrument is so valuable there are rules about who's allowed to play it, and how you position it when it's not being played. The approach of sure, play the Taylor, lend it out, just don't hurt anyone with it doesn't really reflect the value of the thing. But here's the paradox, by making sex cheap it becomes a commodity, and where there's a commodity there's big money to make. That's the business model of the multi-billion dollar commodification of sex that is the porn industry. More after the break.

Today's Undeception is brought to you by Zondervan's new commentary on the Book of Exodus by Christopher Wright. This is a good one. "Shalach Et Ami," that's my best Moses impersonation, "Let my people go." It's the cry of the oppressed ever since Moses first said those words to Pharaoh in Egypt. But

if that's all you remember about the Book of Exodus maybe it's time to take a closer look. It's the second book of the Bible and it offers a sweeping epic narrative about how God's people, the Israelites, escape their enslavement in Egypt. It's a favourite story for Sunday schools and Hollywood alike, but it has also launched justice campaigns throughout history. The plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the 10 Commandments, the wandering in the wilderness and the promise of the Promised Land, it's all in Exodus.

This book of the Bible is central to both Judaism and Christianity, and this brand new commentary by Chris Wright takes us through each passage of Exodus, offering fresh explanations and placing the text in its historical context. Chris Wright also shows how to read the Exodus story in the light of the overarching story of the rest of the Bible. Perhaps it's time you opened the Book of Exodus, it's one of those seen the movie now read the book moments, and the book is better, and this commentary is your ultimate guide. You can get Zondervan's new Exodus commentary in the Story of God collection on Amazon right now, we've put a link in the show notes, or just head to zondervan.com to find out more.

In Zambezia Province, Mozambique, Anglican Aids Waterworks campaign is improving the standard of living for over 5,000 rural villages, including 62 year old Louisa. Louisa had five daughters, but she has lost three of them. One was attacked by a crocodile while at the river collecting water, and two others died of cholera, which could have been prevented had they had access to clean water. The Waterworks campaign has funded boreholes around Louisa's region, making it easy to access clean water for the rest of her family. You can help make this happen in more places. Please head to waterworks.org.au, waterworks.org.au, to learn more about how the Waterworks campaign works and you can donate there, and I urge you to do it today. You can find more in our show notes.

In February this year in Australia, a former Sydney school girl launched a petition calling for sexual consent education to be taught much earlier in schools. The results, recorded by the Sydney Morning Herald, were staggering. Producer Kaley.

Kaley Payne:

Within 24 hours a petition started by 22 year old former Kambala student Chanel Contos delivered a disturbing list of allegations from respondents who said they had been sexually assaulted during high school, or shortly after, by young men who attended nearby Sydney private boys schools. More than 200 young women contacted Ms. Contos with personal testimonies about sexual assault they said they experienced at the hands of a peer at a boy's school. About 1500 students from 50 different schools have signed her petition demanding better and earlier sex and consent education in schools.

John Dickson:

A chorus of voices called for better education, but several others also pointed out that the problem goes way beyond just a school based response. Writing for the Sydney Morning Herald, teacher Dr. Sarah Golsby-Smith put it like this, Kaley.

Kaley Payne:

"The hours we might invest in teaching young men and women about consent would be far out classed by the hours of access young men have to hardcore porn on their phones and on their computers, in which women are routinely debased, violated, and used for patriarchal pleasure."

John Dickson:

You go, Sarah. "This," says Melinda Tankard Reist, "is part of the social cost of pornography's accepted place in society, it warps the way we see others."

Melinda Tankard Reist:

These boys are watching essentially show reels of abuse, and then they're wanting to enact on girls what they've seen. I used to only speak in upper secondary, now I'm doing these talks in primary schools, which I never expected. A boy was interviewed for some research out of the UK a couple of years ago, and he said, "Do I need to strangle girls when I have sex with them?" They think that violence and brutality in sexual relationships are normal and expected, choking and gagging. I have young women say now that they are expected to endure punishing, harsh sex, and they're expected to enjoy it. And if they don't they're told, "There must be something wrong with you," not there's something wrong with the entire culture that tells you should buy into and enjoy your own objectification and mistreatment, but no, you must be prudish and hung up because you don't enjoy sexual violence and sexual debasement. So that's what we are seeing, and these boys just expect to treat girls like this because we've trained them into hostile attitudes and then hostile behaviors.

Bill Struthers:

I think some of the more interesting research that we're beginning to see pop up is the research of what happens when you look at these images, how does that translate out of the sexual context, so to speak? So one of the things that you do see is that when you are looking at images of people who are just naked, and if you can imagine in a medical textbook where you're doing, here's a picture of a human being naked because we want to name their body parts, we want to do that. That when people view those images and they're not sexualized, we actually see that person as a vulnerable human being who is a moral agent.

If, however, you dress that image up and you sexualize them in such a way that they give you this come hither their look, or you've put some makeup on them, or they're bending themselves, or they're accentuating a part of their body, what the research suggests is that you actually see them as less of a moral agent. And so one of the things that we need to be looking at is how is that spilling over into non-sexualized relationships, that is if all you're viewing is sexualized people over and over and over again, does that spill out over into the interactions that you have with people in your day to day activities?

John Dickson:

And you're suggesting there is research that's pointing in that direction.

Bill Struthers:

Yeah, a study done in 2011, even 10 years ago people were noticing this. A lot of it is the language that we normally hear used is that pornography trains people to objectify people, especially women, that's the standard narrative is that, oh yeah, pornography objectifies women. I think that's probably not the best way to refer to it. If anything pornography animalifies, or dehumanizes women, or makes them be less worthy of dignity, for lack of a better way, because they're just animals that want to have sex, that's what it's all about.

John Dickson:

So is it just a feminist issue? Woman are just the victims here, and the problem is that men are just behaving badly? Or are men in any way victims in all this?

Melinda Tankard Reist:

Oh, of course. Boys, I believe, are victims, yes, because they're being preyed upon by a global industry that is deliberately targeting them. We talk about accidental exposure, but there's evidence that it's not accidental, that the porn industry is dropping porn deliberately into the places where boys are, especially online. It's in video games, it's in all kinds of places that young people go, and boys are being trained into aggression, into trivializing significant relationships of seeing girls as just there to get off on. I believe young men are being sold a lie, that they're being indoctrinated with false views of women and girls. It's a disaster for women and girls, of course it is, but it also is for boys because it's inhibiting their ability to incorporate sensitivity and empathy into their relationships.

John Dickson:

This is the theme of a classic episode in the seventh best sitcom of all time, Friends. I really looked that up. The episode is titled The One About Free Porn. Joey and Chandler think they've hit the jackpot when their cable service accidentally delivers them free porn, but after just a few days of nonstop pornography they start to lose their grip on reality.

Chandler:

Hey.

Joey:

Hey.

Chandler:

I was just at the bank, and there was this really hot teller, and she didn't ask me to go do it with her in the vault.

Joey:

Same kind of thing happen to me, woman pizza delivery guy comes over, gives me the pizza, takes the money and leaves.

Chandler:

What, no nice apartment, bet the bedrooms are huge?

Joey:

No, nothing.

Chandler:

You know what, we have to turn off the porn.

Joey:

I think you're right.

John Dickson:

Turning off the porn is no easy task. Pornhub alone has 120 million users a day. That's the equivalent of the populations of Australia, Canada, Poland, and the Netherlands combined, every day. Statistics released by the web hosting company Fasthosts place the traffic metrics of Pornhub, and its next biggest rival Xvideos, above those of Amazon, Netflix, and Reddit combined. The campaign against Pornhub in 2020, the one that led Visa and MasterCard to block their cards from use on the site, culminated in the giant site removing millions of videos depicting child abuse, rape, and incest. The purge of unregistered videos meant that the site went from 13.8 million available videos to 2.9 million. Melinda Tankard Reist says that was an enormous win, but there's still 2.9 million videos, and it's a myth to say that the tens of thousands of girls, mainly girls, shown in these videos are there happily in a free exchange of money for labour.

What is the link between ordinary pornography and human trafficking?

Melinda Tankard Reist:

People think of trafficking into the sex industry as trafficking into brothels, into prostitution, and that's certainly true, but women and girls are also trafficked into the global porn industry. Women are used to film pornography, women are also filmed when they don't know they're being filmed, or videos are taken of them through hidden webcams, which is a global issue. So non-consensual filming of women, also known as upskirting and downblousing. So Pornhub hosts this content, we've exposed that, including the actual real trafficking in the bodies of women and girls to produce this pornography in the first place.

John Dickson:

So you're saying there's a chance that the 15 year old boy at home looking at porn is actually looking at a girl who has been trafficked?

Melinda Tankard Reist:

What I say to young men is there's no dolphin-free version of porn. You've got your dolphin-free tuna. Because what boys will often say is, "Oh, she was smiling, she seemed to enjoy it." This is not proof.

What I try to convey to young men who are consuming porn is that you have actually become a patron of the global industry that traffics women and girls for this purpose, because you don't know, you don't know her backstory, you don't know how she came to be there, and you can't do this in conscience. Now fortunately I've spoken to young men who have told me that one of the reasons they stopped consuming porn, they said, was when they learned more about the actual lives of the women in the porn industry, how they'd come to be there, what their backgrounds were, and what was done to them in the industry, they could not in good, in conscience, continue to view this.

Simon:

Being in the grip of pornography you want yourself to be lost in the fantasy that the people engaged in the pornography are there for you, and that they're not acting, that they're not doing it under duress.

John Dickson:

That's our friend Simon again.

Simon:

And that dark side of the whole porn industry is something that you just switch off, even if it's not trafficking you don't go, well, this person may be doing this to get some money, do I realize me engaging in this means this porn is part of their story for their entire life, and if they ever want to leave it behind, they can't, and the price of loving the people who you are consuming is those two things can't coexist, to some degree. And part of the process out of pornography was actually realizing what is happening in pornography, and who the people are, and who you are in relation to them.

John Dickson:

Here's the other thing about porn, even if your brain isn't rewired by porn, even if you don't have a high viewer of sex, I can't see how porn isn't a justice issue. We rightly condemn racism because it refuses to give due dignity to a fellow human being made in the image of God. Or if you prefer the more secular version in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. Justice is about paying respect to those who are your equals, and treating them like it. This is why so many of us fight against economic inequality too. I don't just mean the natural disparities between the rich and the not so rich, I mean the perverse inequality, where people through no fault of their own sink into starvation and easily preventable diseases. No one who believes in the equal dignity of all humans can be comfortable with that.

Here's the thing, porn reduces another human being to a two dimensional object of my pleasure. It is unjust. It's impossible to view that woman or man on the screen as you are equal, and then fantasize as you like about them as you bring yourself to an orgasm. Even if the person on the screen isn't a victim of trafficking or of harsh conditions to make ends meet, porn by definition objectifies, demeans, and dehumanizes another human being. The Apostle Paul in the New Testament has this deeply humanizing way of urging his protegee, Timothy, to honor women in his congregations. He says, "Treat younger women as your sisters, with absolute purity." Think of every person on the screen in front of you as your

sister, your brother, as someone invested with dignity, and porn becomes illogical and unjust. Over and above any harm it does, the porn industry is about cultivating a habit in us of viewing other humans as mere flesh, mere objects of my pleasure. I hope I don't offend anyone in saying this, but if I advocate for racial and economic justice by day, and then watch porn at night, I'm a hypocrite

Melinda Tankard Reist:

We press on in these global campaigns, and just this year we have had so many victories. We had a massive win against the huge global shopping eCommerce platform Alibaba after we exposed the sale of child sexual abuse dolls. Now these are replica children, they're lifelike, you can commission a doll based on a real child, and they are for penetrative sex, and there were 23 companies selling those dolls on Alibaba, and we exposed it, we documented the dolls, we documented who were selling them, we targeted the CEOs and investors in Alibaba and we got them down, and it only took us a few weeks. Now while that's a victory you do have to ask, why do we have to have these campaigns in the first place?

John Dickson:

Let's press pause, I've got a five minute Jesus for you. In the Judeo-Christian tradition sex has been seen as the sign and seal of the self-giving of one human being to another. More than pleasure, more than procreation, sex is sacred in the sense that it symbolizes and achieves oneness between two individuals. The first reference to sex in the Bible emphasizes this, "A man leaves his father and mother, and is united to his wife and they become one flesh," Genesis 2:24. In the New Testament the Apostle Paul likewise says that illicit sex still creates a kind of illicit oneness. "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?" 1 Corinthians 6:16.

Even the frequent euphemism for sex used throughout the Old Testament, to know a woman, is suggestive of this same point. People sometimes make fun of the quaint terminology to know her in the biblical sense, but the Bible's choice of word isn't prudish. Indeed, scripture is frequently more open about sexual extravagance and deviance than polite secular society today. This word underlines the intimacy creating nature of intercourse. In an ideal setting one comes to know a partner in a profound way through sexual intimacy. It's a point we can now describe in scientific terms as sexual health research stresses the bonding hormones released with sexual encounters.

The mental and spiritual dimensions of sex are stressed in Jesus' transposition of the seventh commandment, the commandment against adultery. True to form, he takes the law of Moses to a surprising level. "You have heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery, but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart," Matthew chapter five verses 27 and 28. There's something to notice here to rightly feel the force of Jesus remarks. The English adverb lustfully here could imply that a mere feeling of arousal in the presence of another person is wrong, is even adultery, but in the original Greek this is what's called a purposive clause, not an adverbial expression. It literally reads, whoever looks at a woman in order to lust for her, not just looks at a woman lustfully, looks at a woman in order to lust for her.

The issue is not the feeling of arousal caused by noticing someone is attractive, it's not referring to a passing erotic thought, Jesus is talking about intending to look at someone in order to satisfy your desire.

The reference here is to nursing desire, directing desire, aiming to fulfill desire. Perhaps nothing is a clearer target of this particular teaching of Jesus than porn. It's a kind of adultery, Jesus said.

People sometimes slander all this stuff in the Bible as having too low of view of sex as dirty and taboo. The opposite is the case. If I value my car I'll be careful how I use it and to whom I lend it. The Bible values sex enough to limit its enjoyment to the most intimate human relationship imaginable. A more secular unrestrained approach might have the appearance of sexual liberation and celebration, but it's frequently little more than a diminishing of the symbolic and relational power of sex. It's lending out the car too freely. If you think of sex as merely a pleasurable physical experience, it probably makes sense to throw off any perceived shackles. So long as it's safe, it's fine. It's a bodily delight only, like eating an exquisite meal. But if you find yourself persuaded that sex is a joyous, physical enactment of a profound spiritual truth about oneness with another human being, you'll approach sexual activity very differently.

C.S. Lewis, the great Oxford Literary Don, and public advocate of Christianity, once defended the biblical approach to sex against the call in his day, 1940s for more sexual freedom. His insights are as relevant today as then, listen to this, "I know some muddle-headed Christians have talked as if Christianity thought that sex, or the body, or pleasure were bad in themselves, but they were wrong. Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body, which believes that matter is good, that God himself once took on a human body, that some kind of body is going to be given to us even in heaven, and is going to be an essential part of our happiness, our beauty, and energy. Christianity has glorified marriage more than any other religion, and nearly all the greatest love poetry in the world has been produced by Christians. If anyone says that sex in itself is bad, Christianity contradicts him at once.

There is nothing to be ashamed of in enjoying your food. There would be everything to be ashamed of if half the world made food the main interest of their lives and spent their time looking at pictures of food and dribbling and smacking their lips. I do not say that you and I are individually responsible for the present situation, our ancestors have handed over to us organisms which are warped in this respect, and we grow up surrounded by propaganda in favour of unchastity. There are people who want to keep our sex instinct inflamed in order to make money out of us. Because, of course, a man with an obsession is a man who has very little sales resistance." You can press play now.

Melinda Tankard Reist:

This campaign isn't run by people who are anti-sex, in fact it's quite the opposite, it's people who think that sex is actually really great and shouldn't be misused in the way it is for profits of the global ejaculation industry, a global industry which trades in the degradation of women. Teachers are telling me that they're seeing more brutality and more cruelty, more sexual demands being made at school, more demands for sexual selfies. I was told about even a faith-based school in Western Australia where the first day back post COVID the girls were greeted to photocopies of boys' penises on their school lockers, and this is at a Christian school. Another school told me that there's a new game going around, it's called the boner game, and this was being played by year nine students, where the boys invite the girls to lap dance them, and the boy that's the last to get an erection is the winner of the game.

How will they know that there's another way to live and to be in the world? How will they understand authentic human connection and intimacy when porn is their formative environment, when porn is their primary sex educator?

Bill Struthers:

The problem with online pornography is that it's sexual intimacy junk food. You're basically just feeding yourself on stuff that's been super refined and taken out of its proper context, this is not something that's really going to nourish you. If anything you're going to only prefer super sweet things, you're only going to prefer the kind of stuff that you're putting into your system, so to speak, so you're going to want intimacy that looks like the porn that you're viewing, and that's just junk.

John Dickson:

This is the place where I often ask you to think about donating to Undeceptions, but today can I ask you instead to go to collectiveshout.org and give to Melinda and the team. They are doing amazing work in combating the pornification and objectification of women and girls. They're not a Christian organization specifically, though Melinda herself is a strong believer, they're just fighting for justice, for a culture where women get the dignity and respect they deserve. That's collectiveshout.org. By all means, though, head to Undeceptions.com and check out the huge library of bonus material, and while you're there send us a question by audio, or just by typing, and I'll try and answer it in a future episode.

Next episode we're talking about finding God in the silly little things. See ya.

Undeceptions is hosted by me, John Dickson, produced by Kaley Payne, and directed by Mark Hadley, editing by Nathaniel Shumack. Special thanks to our series sponsor Zondervan for making this Undeception possible. Undeceptions is part of the Eternity Podcast Network, an audio collection showcasing the seriously good news of faith today.

Kaley Payne:

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Speaker 10:

Episode 43, editorial 20 in three, two-

John Dickson:

This is a theme of a classic episode in the seventh best sitcom of all time, Friends. I really looked that up. Kaley, don't give me that look, the seventh best sitcom.

Kaley Payne:

What are the other ones? What are the other ones>

Speaker 10:

That's actually-

Kaley Payne:

Seinfeld.

John Dickson:

Yeah, Seinfeld was number one. The Simpsons is above it too.

Kaley Payne:

Is Frasier in it?

John Dickson:

No, not above friends, but there was-

Kaley Payne:

Hey, just while John Dickson is out of the room, here are the seven most popular sitcoms of all time. Number seven, Friends, six, The Simpsons, five, Rye Andy Griffith Show, number four, All in the Family, whatever that is. Three, I Love Lucy, two, M*A*S*H, and number one, of course, Seinfeld. See ya.