

Commentary: “Ethically sourced porn?”—A response to Nadia Bolz-Weber

November 12, 2018

“Now, there are issues of justice and exploitation within the porn industry, no question, but it doesn’t mean consumption of pornography should be shamed. There is ethically sourced porn. There are people who say it’s sexual immorality, but if you take Liberals and Conservatives who show outrage and made a Venn diagram of those who consume pornography, you’d see a huge overlap.”

Nadia Bolz-Weber said the preceding in a recent interview with *Out In Jersey*, an LGBTQ publication. Her newest book, *Shameless: A Sexual Reformation*, is due out in Jan. 2019.

Bolz-Weber, former pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver, is no stranger to controversy. An ordained Lutheran, she is a popular figure in what is called “progressive Christianity.” Her writings and sermons regularly challenge traditional Christian beliefs and values.

Is ethically sourced porn a possibility?

To be fair to Bolz-Weber, she acknowledges the porn industry is rife with exploitation, drug use and other harmful practices. Her concept of “ethically sourced porn”—so far as I can tell—would involve such things as consent and honest business practices.

I would grant it is at least theoretically possible to make porn in which no one is manipulated or physically hurt. Consenting adults have the right to

engage privately in all sorts of sex acts, so what's wrong with also consenting to have someone record it and distribute the recording?

Quite a bit, actually.

Regardless of your confessional stance or personal views on sexual morality, there is [some evidence](#) showing a connection between pornography consumption and serious harm to sexual health.

The biblical view of sexuality

There are deeper problems with Bolz-Weber's perspective, however. For a self-identified Christian, she is remarkably flippant and dismissive toward Scripture, at one point declaring the Bible isn't clear about anything.

The paradigm for human sexuality is found near the very beginning of the Bible. Genesis 2:24 states, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Both Jesus and Paul explicitly use this text to ground their views on sexuality and marriage (Matthew 19:5, 1 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 5:31).

According to the Bible, God designed sexuality to be expressed only in the context of a committed, covenant relationship between a husband and wife. Sexuality is meant to be mutual, personal and loving (1 Corinthians 7:3-5, Ephesians 5:21-33).

Pornography cannot provide that. A digital screen or a magazine page cannot give you love, mutuality or relationship. And even consuming porn with your spouse violates the exclusive, private bond the two of you are meant to share.

The biblical view of lust

The Bible also is filled with warnings against lust (Proverbs 6:25, Ezekiel 23, Matthew 5:28, Romans 1:27, 1 Thessalonians 4:5, James 1:14-15, etc.). It is important to note that “lust” in the Bible does not refer always to something sexual. At its most basic, lust is simply a strong desire. Yet the Bible frequently uses the word “lust” in connection with sexual sin.

Jesus’ words about lust in the Sermon on the Mount are perhaps the most pointed and well-known: “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28).

Jesus is not condemning the natural attraction between men and women. There is nothing wrong with appreciating the beauty with which God has created another person.

Appreciation crosses the line into lust when you turn another person into an object for your own gratification. Lust is selfish and impersonal. Lust is sexually fantasizing about another, using him or her to fulfill your own desires while bypassing relationship, commitment and love.

The relationship between lust and porn

A person does not look at porn to appreciate the beauty of God’s design for human sexuality. A person views porn specifically to pursue sexual satisfaction through the objectification of other people. The screen and the page allow the viewer to bypass relationship, commitment, sacrifice and love. The people in the picture or video are no longer people; they are objects to be used and disposed of at will.

Consuming pornography, then, is inherently lustful, and those who make pornography do so specifically to feed others’ lusts.

I have tried to remain gender-neutral in my discussion thus far, but I need to point out that porn objectifies women far more than it does men. In a culture that already treats women like trash, pornography further encourages viewing women as objects rather than real people.

Pornography is a poison

Personally, I find the concept of “ethically sourced porn” about as absurd as “ethically sourced cyanide.” Pornography is corrosive to relationships, individual sexual health and spiritual vitality.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20: “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.”

Although it is not obvious in English translations, Paul subtly shifts between the singular and the plural forms of “you” and “your” in these verses. He is talking about individual people sinning against their own bodies, yet he connects this to the *collective* body of the church as a “temple of the Holy Spirit.”

Sexual sin—including pornography consumption—is destructive both to our own bodies and to the body of Christ, the church. If you drink that poison, you will take others down with you.

Sorry, Nadia Bolz-Weber, but any attempt to legitimize porn flies in the face of biblical teaching and threatens the health of the church. There is nothing “ethical” about pornography.

The only virtue we can associate with porn is God’s grace in curing those of us who have been poisoned by it. Praise be to the Lord, who loves us and

washes us from sin by his abundant mercy.

Joshua Sharp is a Master of Divinity student and graduate assistant in the Office of Ministry Connections at [Truett Seminary](#) in Waco, Texas.