The Impact and Social Costs of Modern Pornography

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This Presentation Will:

- Be presented from a clinical and research-based perspective
- Use language and imagery that is psychologically safe (nothing obscene)
- Define pornography and explain why it is impactful
- Explain *Compulsive Sexual Behavior Disorder's* connection to pornography
- Provide an overview of the known impacts on adults, marriages, and youth.

Pornography refers to sexually explicit material, in print, digital, or audiovisual form, that is primarily intended to sexually arouse the consumer.

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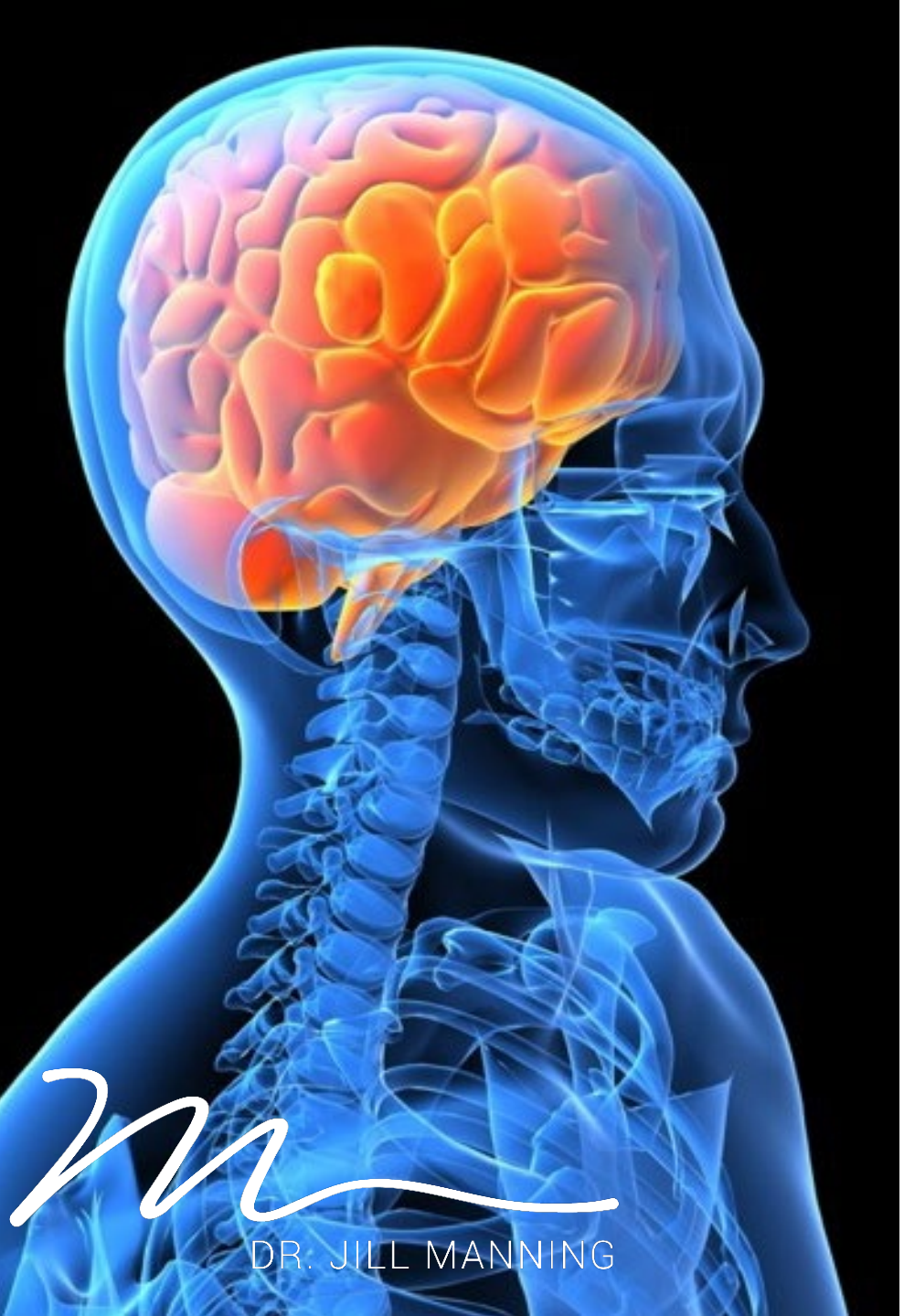


Why is pornography so impactful?

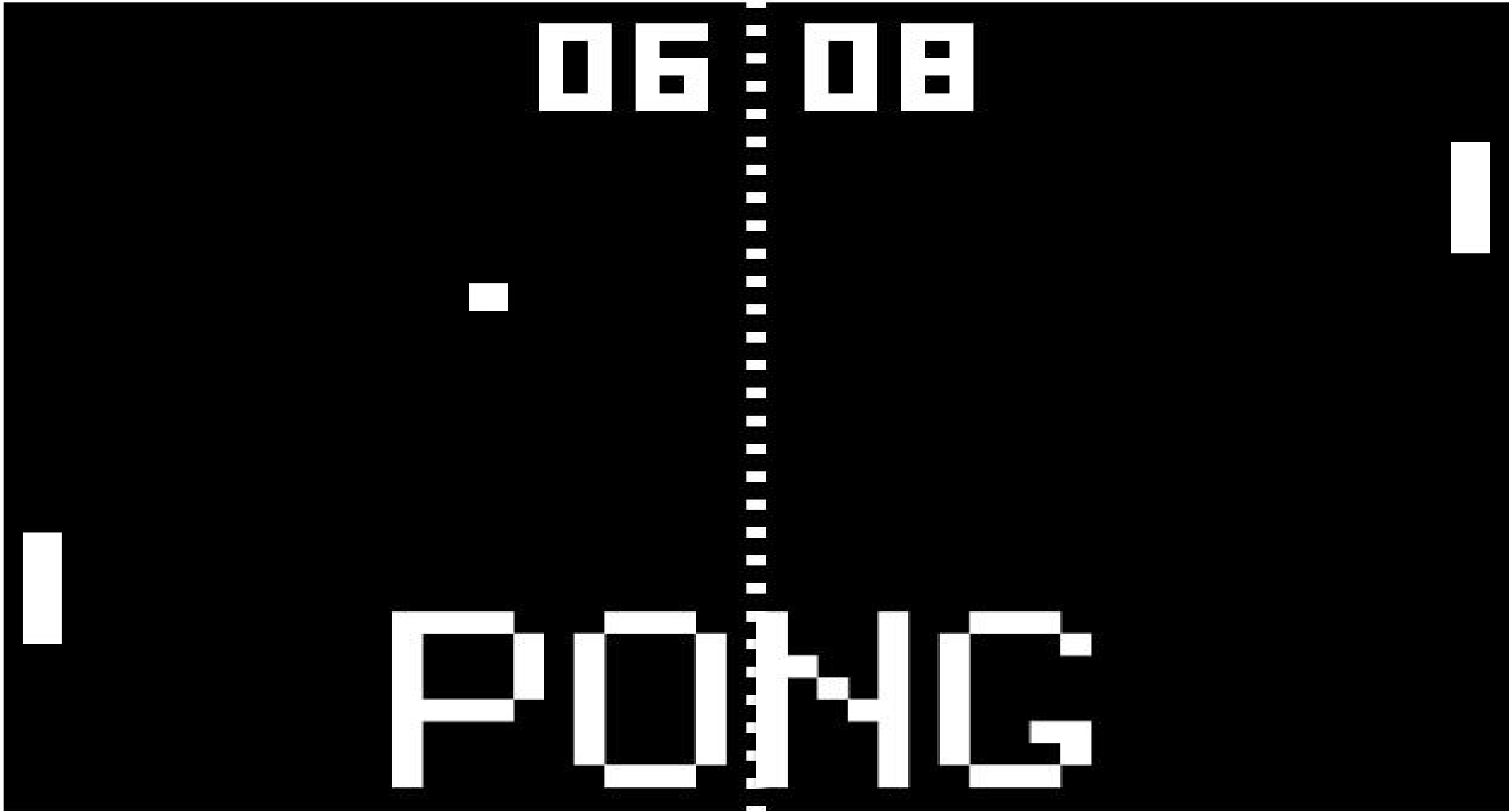
1. **Highly potent & rapid stimulus** – activates a neurochemical reaction in 3/10ths of a second
2. **Image dominance** – brain prioritizes image as “facts,” text as “opinion”
3. **Rapid belief & attitudinal shifts** – measurable within 5 hours of exposure
4. **Reward learning** – behaviors are reinforced and viewed as desirable or acceptable when paired with reward
5. **Emotional encoding** – stronger recall when paired with heightened emotional state
6. **Anonymity effect** – antisocial behaviors & attitudes escalate more rapidly online (part of “Triple-A Engine”)



Supranormal Stimuli

Nikolaas Tinbergen, Ph.D.

"Exaggerated imitation *can exert a stronger pull than the real thing*."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WHAT IS COMPULSIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR DISORDER?

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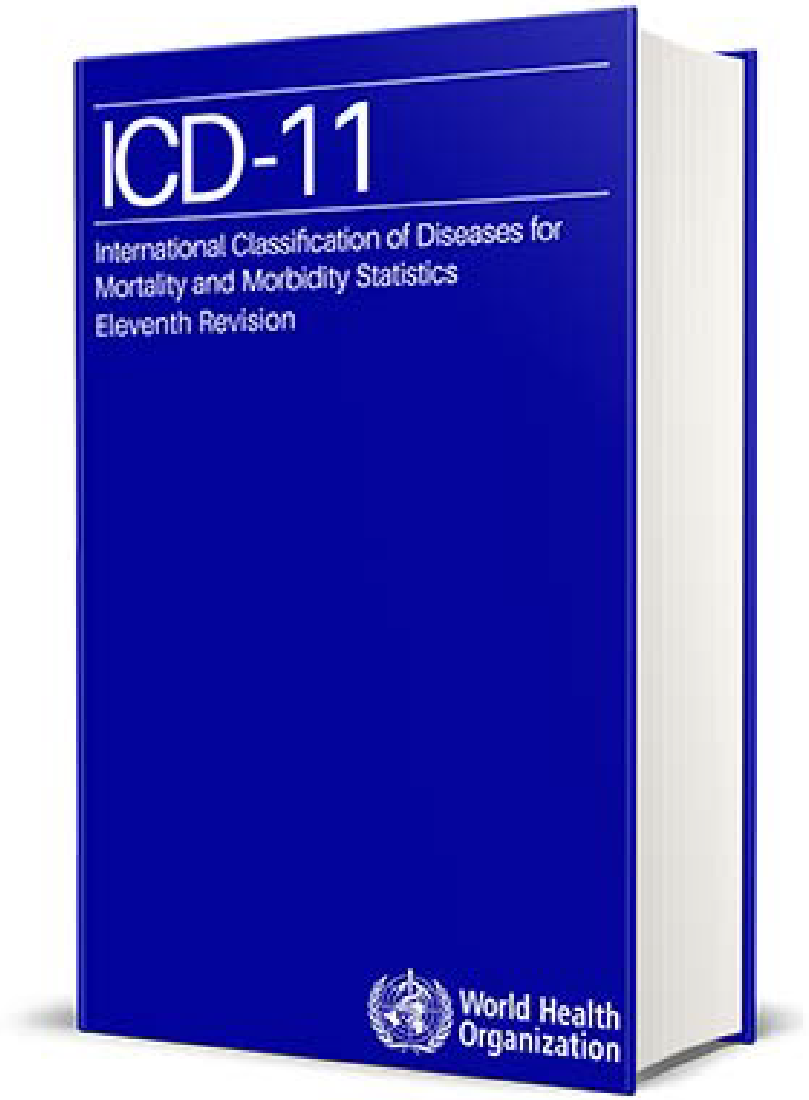
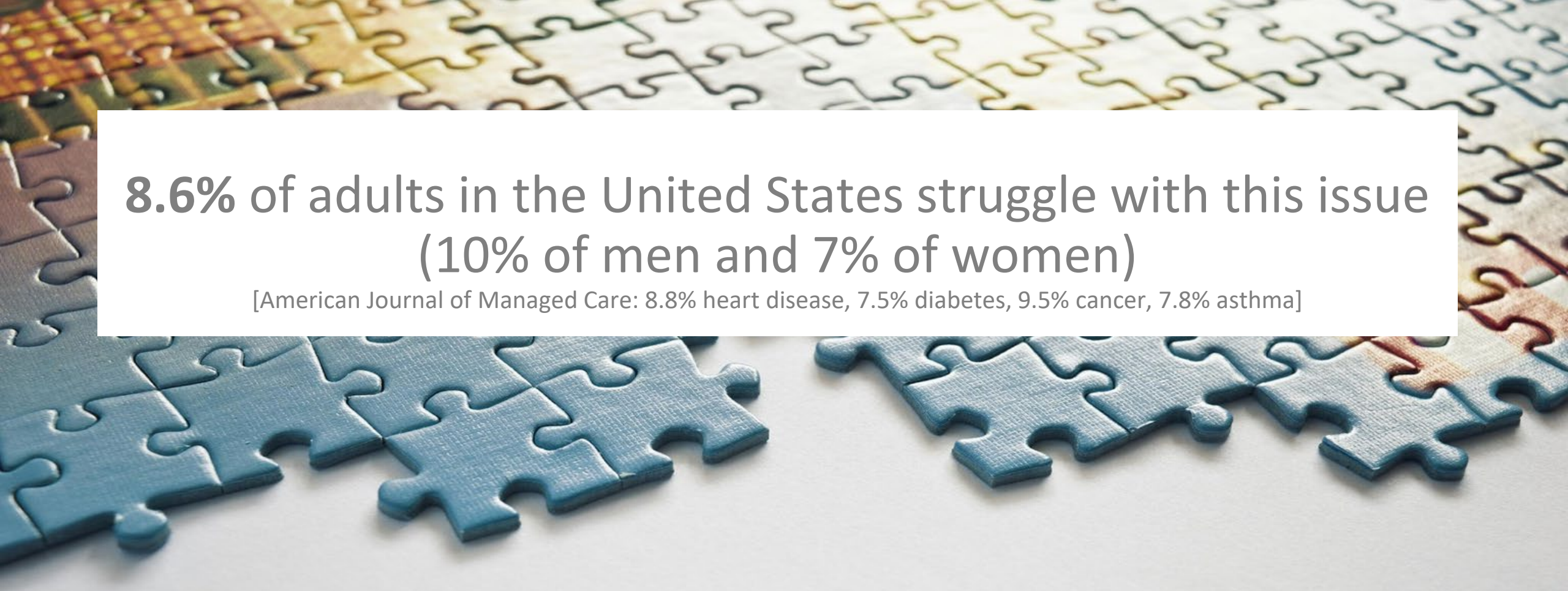
6C72: **Compulsive sexual behaviour disorder is characterised by a persistent pattern of failure to control intense, repetitive sexual impulses or urges resulting in repetitive sexual behaviour.**

Symptoms may include repetitive sexual activities becoming a central focus of the person's life to the point of **neglecting health and personal care or other interests, activities and responsibilities**; numerous unsuccessful efforts to significantly reduce repetitive sexual behaviour; and continued repetitive sexual behaviour despite adverse consequences or deriving little or no satisfaction from it.

The pattern of failure to control intense, sexual impulses or urges and resulting repetitive sexual behaviour is manifested over an extended period of time (e.g., **6 months or more**), and causes **marked distress or significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational, or other important areas of functioning**. Distress that is entirely related to moral judgments and disapproval about sexual impulses, urges, or behaviours is not sufficient to meet this requirement.



Formally adopted May 2019
Codified January 2022



8.6% of adults in the United States struggle with this issue (10% of men and 7% of women)

[American Journal of Managed Care: 8.8% heart disease, 7.5% diabetes, 9.5% cancer, 7.8% asthma]

Approximately **22.2 million** American adults deal with this clinical issue, reflecting a prevalence rate of approximately **1 in 11.6** adults. **80-90%** of adults with CSBD have a primary issue with **problematic pornography use.**

Dickenson JA, Gleason N, Coleman E, Miner MH. Prevalence of Distress Associated With Difficulty Controlling Sexual Urges, Feelings, and Behaviors in the United States. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2018;1(7):e184468. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.4468; Briken P, Bőthe B, Carvalho J, Coleman E, Giraldi A, Kraus SW, Lew-Starowicz M, Pfaus JG. Assessment and treatment of compulsive sexual behavior disorder: a sexual medicine perspective. Sex Med Rev. 2024 Jun 26;12(3):355-370. doi: 10.1093/sxmrev/qeae014. PMID: 38529667; PMCID: PMC11214846.

Why does this matter?

- Increased strain on medical & mental health care systems.
- Loss of productivity in the workplace.
- Declining academic performance among youth.
- Complications in child custody & divorce proceedings.
- Distorted social & sexual norms affecting both singles & relationships.
- Rise in sexual exploitation, human trafficking, prostitution, and societal attitudes toward sex & consent.

Effects of Pornography

1. Decreased sensitivity toward & increased objectification of females (by males & females)
2. Less progressive views of gender roles
3. Increased risk of becoming aggressive & abusive
4. More than 3X more likely to commit adultery
5. More than 4X more likely to pay for sex
6. Acquisition of mechanical & transactional views of sex



Effects of Pornography

7. Increased risk of sexual dysfunction & dissatisfaction
8. Decreased desire to marry & have children
9. Decreased trust in partner
10. Increases risk of separation & divorce (by 200%)
11. Increased risk of job loss
12. Diminished spirituality & integrity with personal values



Other Dynamics Associated with Pornography Use that Impact Marriage

- Active deception, withholding & lies
- Increased risk of abusive behavior
- Entitlement
- Narcissistic abuse
- Anger issues
- Deficient Parenting
- Sexual coercion or avoidance
- Controlling behavior
- Financial betrayal
- Domestic violence
- Substance abuse (40 – 60%)
- Financial instability

Characteristics of Stable & Healthy Marriages	Common Effects of Pornography Consumption
Mutual belief in the institution of marriage	Decreased desire to marry & have children
Fidelity (body, mind & heart)	3X more likely to commit adultery & 4X more likely to pay for sex
Mutual respect	Decreased sensitivity toward women & less progressive views of gender roles
Trust	Decreased trust in partner
Intimacy strengthens the marital bond	Increased risk of sexual dysfunction & dissatisfaction
A spiritual foundation & reverence for sacred aspects of life	Diminished spirituality & respect for sacred aspects of life
An assumption of permanence regarding the marital relationship	Increased risk of separation & divorce

Recent relational study (2022):

- Examined 3,500 people in committed relationships in the U.S.
- Looked at pornography-usage, gender, perceived addiction, level of religiosity, and type and frequency of pornography use.

"Even when you account for all these factors, there is still a negative effect on relationships…**all of the trend lines go in the negative direction."**

"If you want the best chance of a successful relationship, you would be **avoiding pornography**."

Brian J. Willoughby & Carson R. Dover (December 2022): Context Matters: Moderating Effects in the Associations between Pornography Use, Perceived Addiction, and Relationship Well-being, The Journal of Sex Research, DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2022.2148155



Indirect Effects on Youth

1. Decreased parental time and attention (from the consumer and the parent preoccupied with the consumer)
2. Increased risk of exposure
3. Increased risk of parental separation & divorce
4. Increased risk of parental job loss & financial strain
5. Witnessing and/or being involved in parental conflict & marital stress



Direct Effects on Youth

1. Neurological (Brain) Development:

Pornography structurally alters brain regions responsible for impulse control, decision-making, and emotional regulation while also decreasing grey matter volume in the prefrontal cortex. These structural changes increase susceptibility to compulsive behaviors and addiction.



“Childhood is the exact worst time for someone to be exposed to pornography… The weight of medical evidence demonstrates pornography can become both addictive and compulsive... The compulsive and addictive potential of pornography is a serious public health issue—most dangerous for young people, who are most susceptible…”

Dr. Donald Hilton & Dr. Frederick Toates
Brief of Amici Curiae Scholars submitted to Supreme Court, 2024

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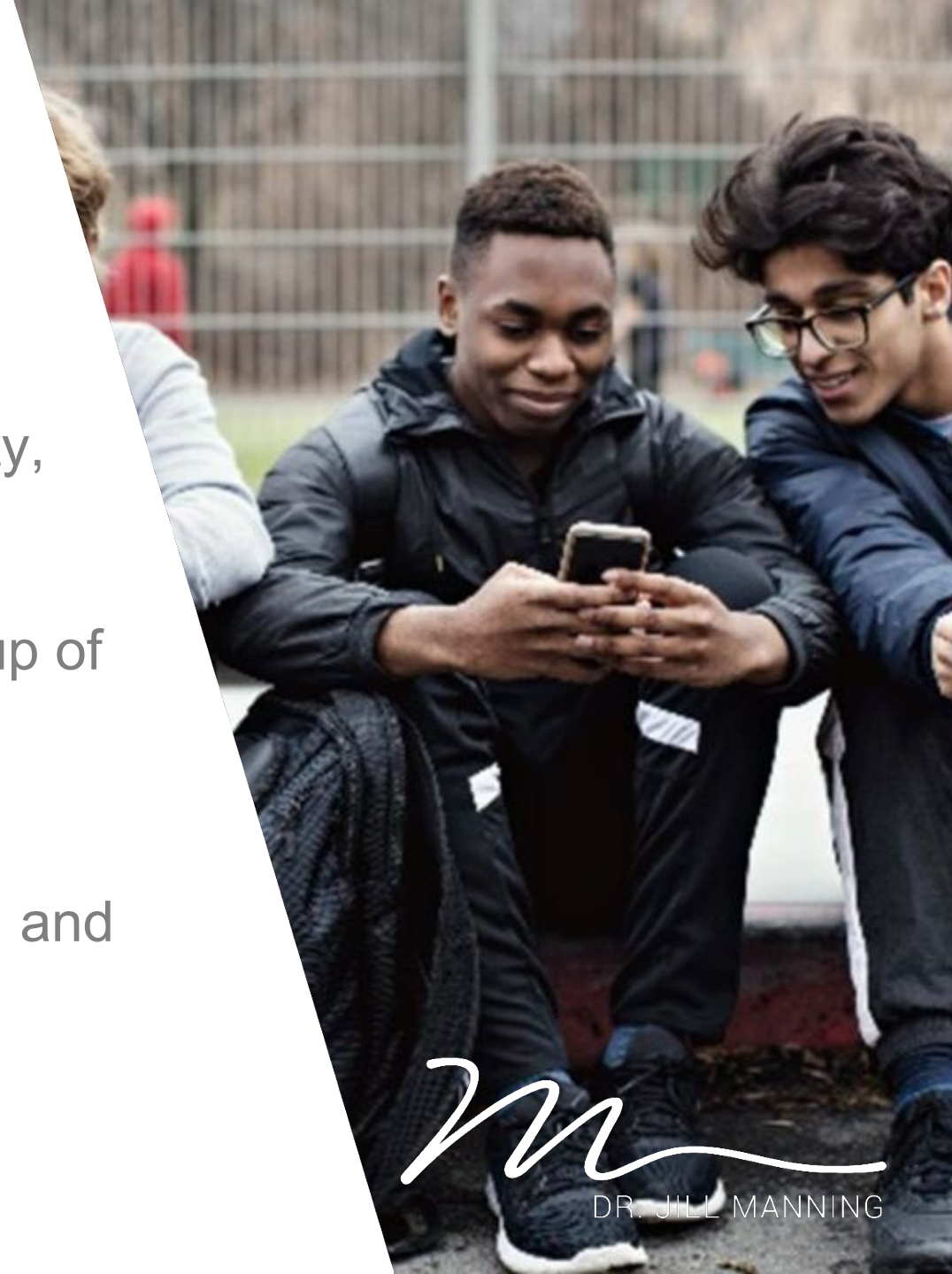
Direct Effects on Youth

2. Cognitive & Behavioral Risks:

- Normalizes aggression, misogyny, promiscuity, and sexual violence
- UK data (2024): children now the largest group of child-on-child sexual abuse perpetrators; pornography cited as leading factor.
- Leads to earlier sexual debut, higher STI risk, and relational dissatisfaction later in life.



Direct Effects on Youth

3. Emotional & Relational Harms:

- Early exposure reduces empathy while increasing relational aggression and narcissistic tendencies
- Lowers self-esteem and distorts body image
- Diminishes ability to form secure attachments



Direct Effects on Youth

4. Academic Performance:

- Research links pornography use to impaired academic performance by
  - Disrupting attention
  - Reducing focus
  - Slowing cognitive function



“Some studies suggest certain adolescents view pornography as educational or exciting in the short term. Clinically, however, I observe that these perceived benefits eventually break down, with the risks outweighing any positives. Because controlled studies on youth are unethical, we must be cautious about self-reported claims of ‘benefits.’ Healthier and non-pornographic ways to learn about sexuality exist.”

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HOW TO STARVE TO DEATH ON A FULL STOMACH. The 272 pieces of rubbish pictured above were fed to this fledgling albatross along with fish caught by its mother. The plastic accumulated in its stomach until it was literally 'too full to eat'. Careless and unregulated dumping is just one of the ways we're killing our oceans. Become an ocean defender at oceans.greenpeace.org

Questions

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Brief Biography of Jill Manning, Ph.D.

- Canadian American scholar & clinician
- Ph.D. in Marriage & Family Therapy; Licensed in Colorado
- Clinical Fellow, American Association for Marriage & Family Therapy
- Published researcher, author, & former Senate sub-committee witness
- Clinical experience in nonprofit, school, inpatient, and hospital settings
- Currently runs a private practice mental health practice
- Raised in a military family; has lived in Europe, Canada, Australia, Israel, USA
- Married, mother of two

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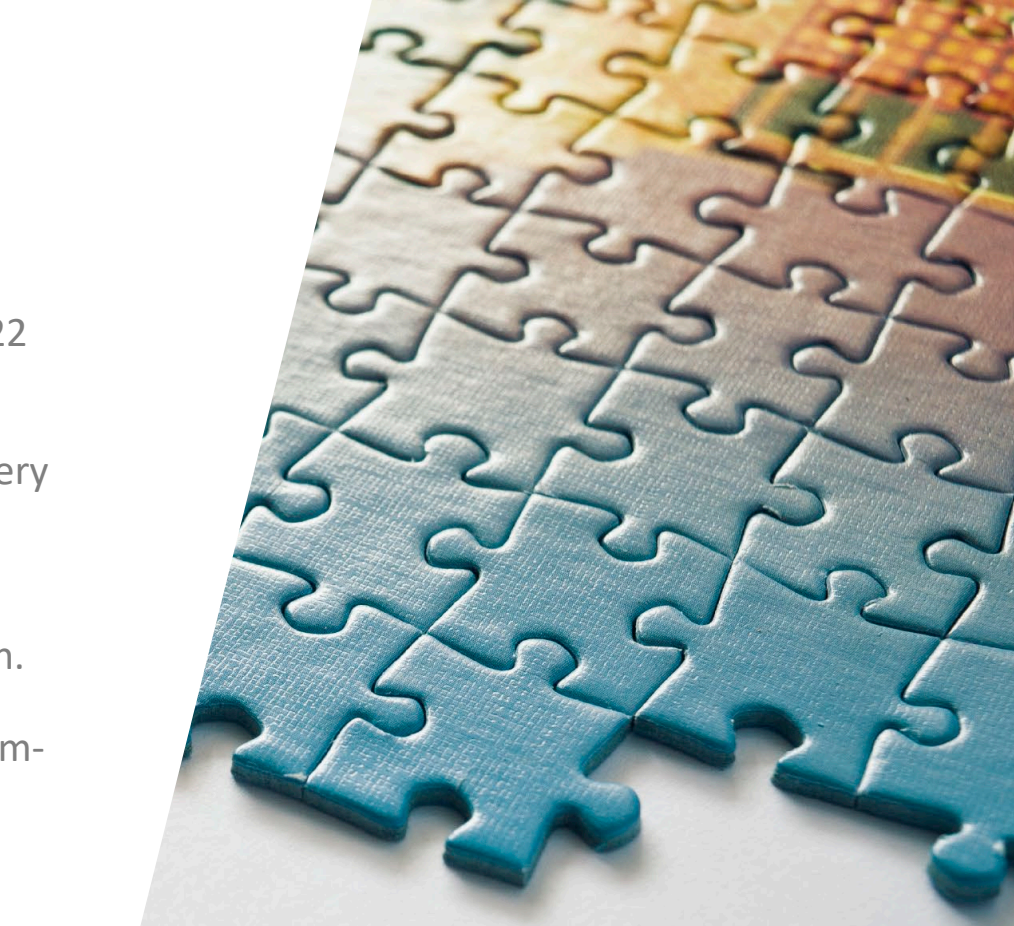

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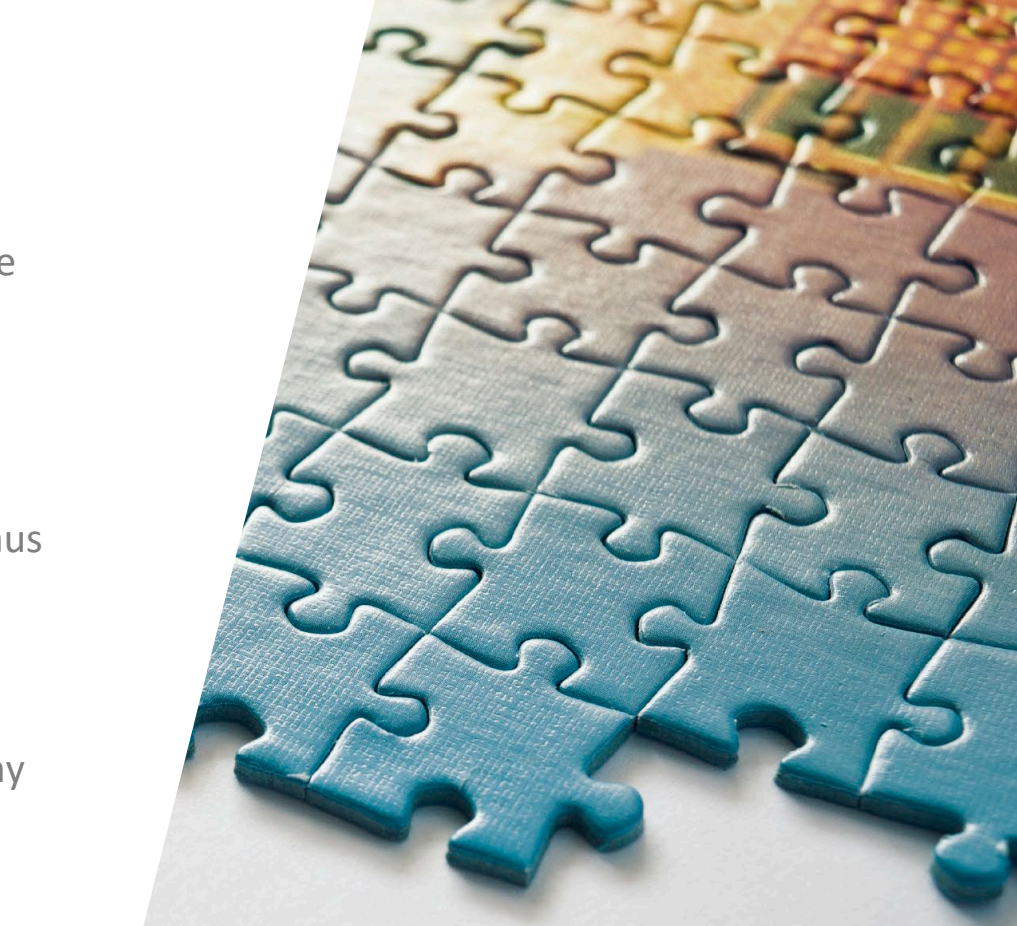

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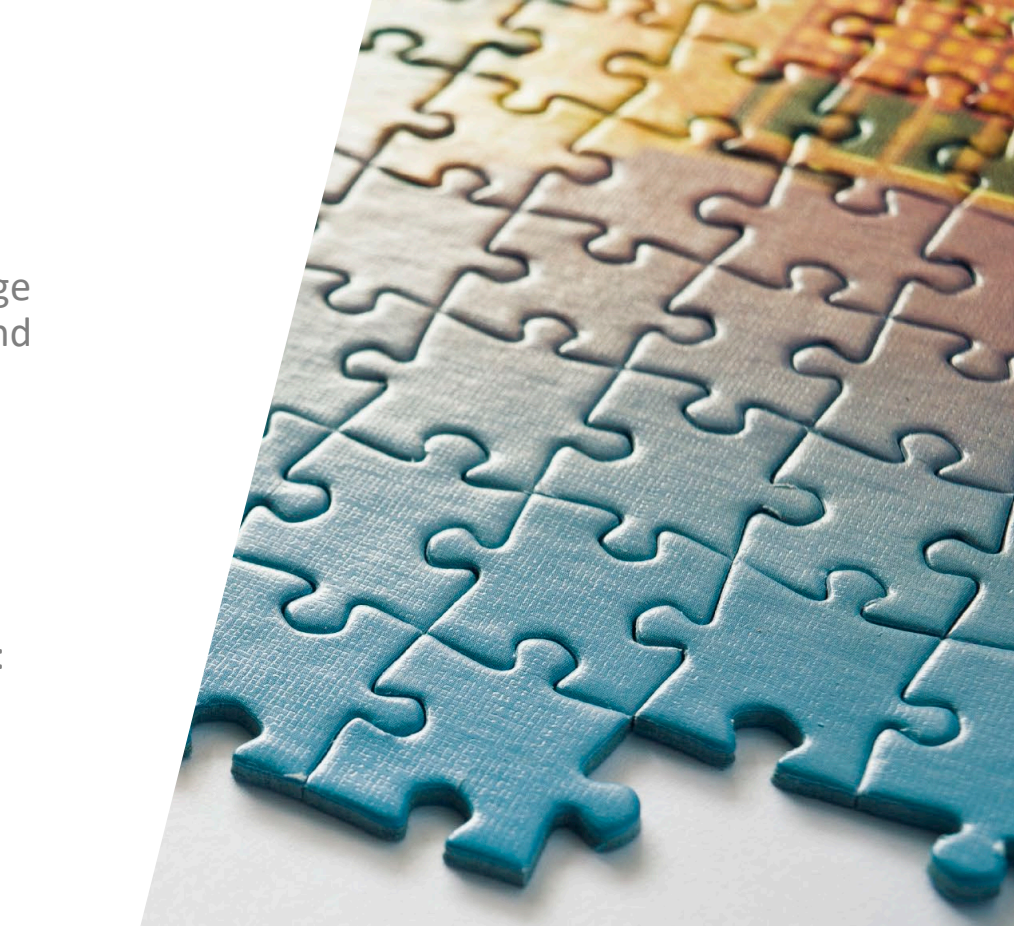

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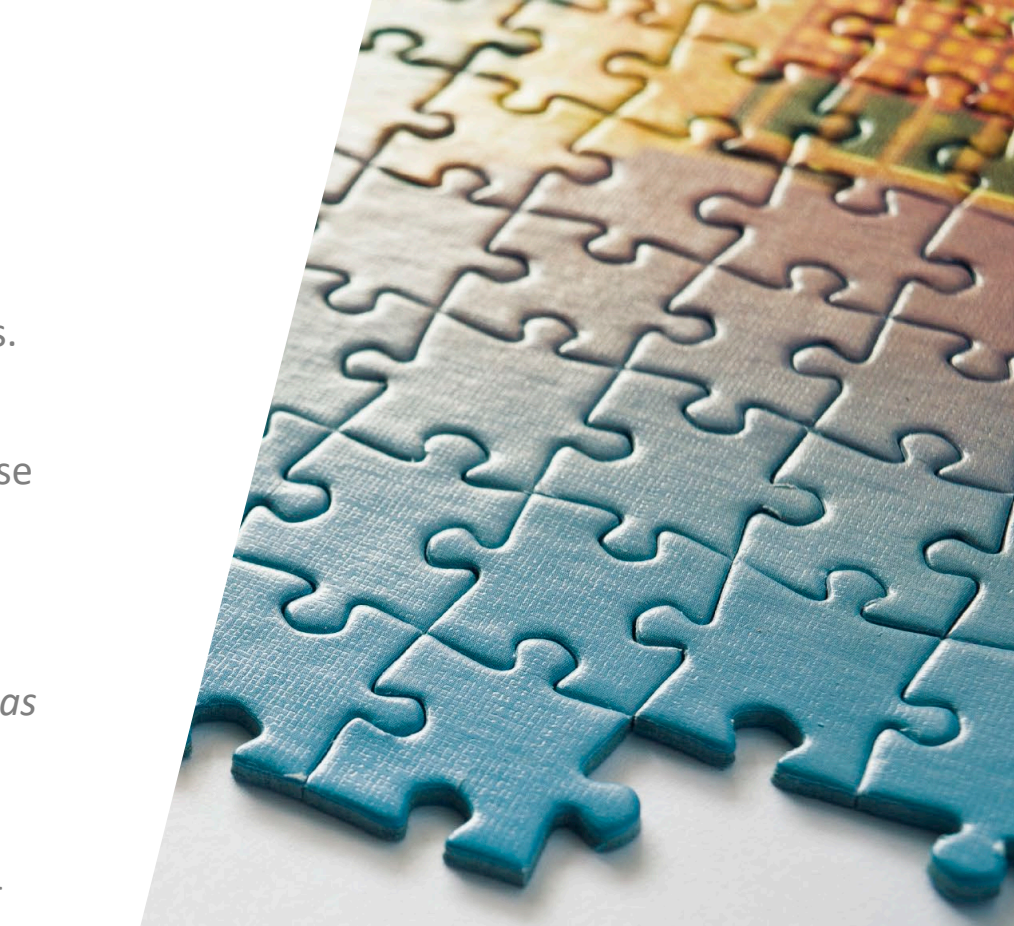

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