

Men, Porn, Power and Intimacy

Every day internet search engines receive sixty eight million requests to view pornographic material. This accounts for twenty five percent of all search engine requests! And who's so busy? You're not surprised: it's the men. Why? Why is it the men? What do men get out of pornography? We can give the quick and obvious answers - the excitement, the stimulation, relief from their boredom, relief from their tension, and so on. But is there perhaps a deeper reason, a deeper search, a deeper need?

Putting pornography aside for the moment, let us ask: what does a heterosexual man experience when a woman warms to him, softens to him, opens to him, and ultimately - gives herself to him? He feels completed. He feels respected and therefore self-respecting, loved and therefore self-loving, worthy and therefore returned to his self-worth. When it really, really comes down to it, there is nothing more important to most men than the loving openness and acceptance of a woman. The adoration and surrender of a woman fills a man's heart.

(For gay and lesbian couples, or reverse-wired heterosexual couples in which the man enacts the feminine, and the woman the masculine, whenever I say 'man' read 'the predominantly masculine partner', and whenever I say 'woman' read 'the predominantly feminine partner'.)

Now traditionally, for thousands of years, through the millennia of what we have come to call 'the patriarchy', whether it was authentic or not, women made the appearance to men of giving them their respect, their love, their service, and above all - their bodies. Believing that it was the duty of a woman to submit to her man, to be submissive to him, to serve him in every way, women opened their bodies to their men - and gave them that sense of completion and self-respect.

There are still women today, many women, who continue to play the part of the submissive female and who, despite the fact that they feel disillusioned by their man's inability to live alongside them in intimacy, offer him submission and sex in order to appease their own insecurities.

But more and more women now refuse to collude with that traditional masculinity - the one that fears its inferiority, and acts out a charade of superiority. No longer socially or economically dependent on men, more and more modern women demand to be met emotionally before they will open sexually. And failing to be met emotionally, they are leaving their partnerships and marriages in their millions. Two thirds of all divorces are filed for by women.

The post-feminist woman is not the submissive, sexually-providing woman of the past. Respect and openness now need to be won. Less and less women believe they should fulfil a man's sexual needs no matter what. This modern woman will not meet his need to feel loved and therefore worthy, regardless of the respect he shows her, or his capacity to meet her at the level of the heart. Without this mirror of approval, men turn to pornography. There, in the celluloid images of adoring and sexually surrendered women, men are gratified with the peace and bliss they once received (or believed they received), from the submissive women of the past.

I am not exploring this subject from a moral point of view. I am certainly not suggesting any moral condemnation. We are looking here at the deeper need behind men's fascination, and often addiction, to pornography. We are going deeper than the need to offload excessive sexual tension, or even to experience heightened states of pleasure. We are looking at the deep, unmet need in a man's heart. This need used to be met (whether sincerely or not), when the traditional woman offered up her beauty to him. But it is no longer met by the less compromising women of the modern age.

This leaves a man (a) without the sexual arena in which he affirmed his sense of his own power, and (b) without the sexual arena in which he affirmed his lovability, his sense of love-worthiness. He feels impotent, or at least less-potent, and unloved. He feels empty, even desperate. And from this place of emptiness he reaches out to connect with a replacement-feminine, a fake-feminine - something that radiates that loving, approving, erotic feminine glow, but which doesn't demand the emotional awareness he so often can't give.

This is the deeper story behind the proliferation of pornography in the modern age. This is the link between men, pornography, power, and intimacy. For thousands of years, in the traditional patriarchal culture, men at least had the illusion of power and intimacy. Now they are bereft, and being unable to come out and confess the lack of personal power, and intimacy, that they feel in their relationships and how, for the most part, their relationships have become almost or completely sexless after the first few years, they are turning inwards and seeking out power and intimacy in private, in the virtual world of pornography.

What is the upshot of men's turning away from their partners and wives? Giving up, as so many men have done, on the hope of receiving that soft, blissful invitation from their partners and wives - what happens to their potency, and what happens to their hearts? And what happens to the hearts of the women? Essentially, the situation just gets worse. The women who withheld their loving embrace because they wanted a sexuality that arose naturally from emotional intimacy, become even more withholding. They become more disillusioned, angrier, and eventually distant and bitter.

Meanwhile, the deeper the man enters the virtual world, the more he becomes a virtual being himself. Resigned to the negative mirror he receives from his partner, and the emotional aridity of his everyday life, he becomes deflated-and-furious, and increasingly alienated, as well as addicted to those porn-full moments when he gets that power-love 'hit', and not only his sex, but also his heart, is soothed.

Clearly then, escape to pornography or, for that matter, to any other compensation for the lack of love and respect that a man feels in his relationship (whether that's into drugs, alcohol, or even addiction to mobile phones, or spirituality), is not the answer. In fact, it only aggravates the situation. What then is the way forwards? Firstly, as we're doing here, we have to go deeper than our moral judgements on our various escapisms, and beyond our guilts and self-judgements. We then need to understand the deep longing in the heart of the masculine to have the feminine shine the soft, erotic light of her physical love upon him. We need to also understand the profound insecurity that drives men to need to dominate women, and conquer them physically, again and again. And we need to understand the contemporary cultural situation, and just how difficult it is for the more feminised man of the modern age (and even for the dinosaur macho man), to receive the sexual 'yes' from their less compromising, more self-valuing, modern partners and wives.

This is not a plea for pity for men. And it is certainly not an attempt to suggest that women should demand less, or return to the self-betrayal of the past. No, if anything, women need to become less compromising. Women need to value their greater capacity for intimacy, their more evolved emotionality, their innate wisdom, and their natural, unpretentious maturity - even more than they have done until now. And the men need to come to respect this. Rather than fearing that any acknowledgement of a woman's emotional superiority will make them less, men need to let the women be the thermometers of relationship that they already are. But first things first.

Before a man can come anywhere near honouring the natural emotional sensitivity of his partner, he needs to begin to recognise the aspects of his personality that believe they are not powerful enough, and not loveable. As soon as a man recognises these aspects of himself he becomes more than these aspects. He is the observer of these aspects. He can say 'there is a part of me that believes I am not powerful enough, and seeks sex with a woman to affirm my power to myself. But however many times I have sex with a woman, and however many times I feel momentarily powerful, that part of me continues to believe I am not powerful enough'. Once a man begins to take responsibility for this part of himself, and realises that no amount of external affirmation will ever convince him of his adequacy and worthiness, then he is on the path of self-knowledge - and he will have to feel his pain - and eventually he will not look outside of himself to affirm his power. He will

look back with shame at how he used the bodies of his partners to prove himself to himself. And he will meet his partner's feminine power from a rootedness in his own masculine power.

And similarly, a man has to come to recognise that aspect of his personality that feels 'I am alone and unloved, and I go to woman to receive a 'hit' of love. When she opens her body to me, and lets me into herself, then in her 'yes' to me, I feel a 'yes' to myself. In her showing me that I am worthy of love, I feel worthy, I feel loved, I find peace.' A man has to become honest enough with himself to admit that this is another form of abuse - not using her to get power, but using her to get love - not love-making, but love-taking. Gradually, as a man opens to the truth of his personality, and sees that no amount of external affirmation of his love-worthiness will ever convince him that he is loveable, he decides that he does not want his life to be controlled by this aspect of his personality. He becomes larger than this needy, love-approval seeking aspect of his personality. Gradually, he comes to have compassion for this aspect of himself. It no longer controls him - in fact, he takes it under his wing, and cares for it. He fathers the younger, less mature aspects of his psyche. In this way he becomes emotionally mature. He feels his own worthiness. And he meets the woman he values from a place of valuing himself.

Only when a man has gone on this journey of re-empowerment and self-knowledge and honesty and pain will he not go to woman for affirmation and approval. Only then will he not treat her as mother or whore, using her to sooth his insecurities around his potency and worth. And only then will he not go to pornography when she refuses to be used in this way. Only then will he hear her 'no' as an invitation to examine the place he's coming from.

'Why is she saying 'no'?', he will ask himself. 'Is it because I am needy and approaching her from that insecure little-boy aspect of myself which desperately needs love - but masking my approach with the 'moves' and smiles and patter of an adult man? Perhaps she can feel-through my facade of sexual bravado, to the love-needy boy beneath. Is that what's happening? Let me check-in with that aspect of my personality. Is it 'up' at the moment? I know that her feminine sensibilities often detect my emotional condition before I do!'

Or there might be scenarios like this: 'sometimes she loves me to 'take her' sexually, with passion and animal abandon - and yet today I went to 'take her' and she was repulsed. I immediately felt angry, rejected, unloved. But because I am 'the father of my psyche' I said to those voices 'wait a minute, I am going to ask her why she was repulsed'. And when I asked she said it was because I was too angry, and she didn't want to be the place where I discharged my anger. She didn't want to me to act out the anger I was feeling towards somebody else on her. In fact, she said she was not only repulsed,

but furious with me. Well, I had to go away and be with that, because it was a very fierce critique. And the angry and rejected voices were getting louder inside me, and I could feel they wanted to start arguing with her, and proving her wrong – proving that I hadn't been 'bad', proving that I was not the kind of man who would use and abuse a woman in that way. But I took myself away, and immediately I was filled with images and memories of my boss at work who had humiliated me in front of the whole office that afternoon, and I had images flash through my mind of punching him in the face, and worse. So I knew she was right. I was angry. And I had wanted to regain my sense of my own power by dominating her sexually. And so I went back to her. And it was painful to confess the truth of how I'd approached her inappropriately. But there was great tenderness between us during my truth-telling, and then later that evening we made love in the most exquisite, passionate and tender way'.

But this is stage two. Stage one for men is recognition of the less mature aspects of the personality that seek a mirror of power and/or love through sex from a partner. And the path to stage two is learning to father these aspects. We often need help from more experienced men for this. Then in stage two we are self-affirming and potent and self-loving enough to meet woman in her own potency and self-love, and to exchange our masculine and feminine gifts.

A woman has her own journey of empowerment, and her own substance and behavioural addictions to negotiate. But I am not discussing those here. Here I am concerned with men's self-destructive relationship with pornography. I am interested in understanding it, without moral judgement, but with psychological insight. What happens? Essentially: modern woman can now say 'no' to men's immaturities - and she does. And man, rather than seeing this rejection as an invitation to maturity, retreats into escapism, self-delusion, isolation and defeat. But this is almost inevitable, because in order to receive her 'no' as an invitation to maturity there already needs to be a considerable degree of emotional maturity.

I have also outlined the most fundamental level of a man's maturity project: coming into relationship with the younger parts of the psyche, learning to listen to them, not being controlled by them, and strengthening the feeling of being 'the father' at the centre of his psyche. From this position a man will not try to use a woman to meet the needs of his angry inner-boy, or sulky inner-boy, or rejected inner-boy, or any of the other younger parts of the psyche, and so he will not be rejected, and so he will not seek soothing and compensation in virtual sex - or anywhere else for that matter.

As a man's maturity project ripens he enters stage two: the stage in which he is self-valuing enough to truly value his partner. This is an absolutely fascinating phase. Not least of all because it has probably never been seen

before on planet earth – at least not collectively, not as a cultural norm. The valuing of women (which is not the same as idealising them, or appreciating them within specific stereotypical boundaries), has not been seen because, until now, women have not been confident and daring enough to say ‘no’, and men have not been humbled and introspective enough to ask ‘why?’ – and to hear the answer, and to act upon it. And, of course, most men, for the most part, are still resisting that ‘no’. But for those men who are interested enough, in women, in themselves, in relationship, in life, to hear and act upon the feminine critique, and gradually emerge into their own (phase two) self-honouring, there is an almost revolutionary new personal and collective possibility of intimacy and mutual empowerment.

Once a man has done his psychological homework, and begun to emerge into ‘maturity project phase two’ he begins to see that from moment to moment his wife or partner seems to know just how open or closed their relationship is. She seems to know when there's anger present, when they're avoiding each other, and when depth and connection is growing. Once a man is man enough, he can listen to his woman, and let her guide their relationship with her feminine emotional-intuition. She then warms to him, and opens to him, and receives effortlessly what he always used to long for, and scheme for, and manipulate for. As ‘phase two’ settles, and life is no longer just a question of struggling to not act-out from immaturity, but a gentle deepening of living from that place of ‘father’ at the centre of his being, then a man even sees a woman's anger as a thermometer, a warning sign, a valuable emotion that's flagging up some disturbance in the flow of intimacy in the relationship.

Yes, it is tough to hear these things. It is tough if we are in ‘stage zero’, that is – still caught in porn and/or other addictions, and therefore often feeling numb and broken, with our minds often full of thoughts of pointlessness. And it is still tough in ‘stage one’ while we are still reclaiming our self-worth. How can we give so much worth to woman when we haven't yet nurtured our own? In truth – with difficulty! That is why we need clear understanding, like the understanding I am outlining here – and brotherhood: the company of other sincere, open men.

Yes, it is extremely difficult for the stage-zero and stage-one fragile male ego to accept that his maturity might mean that he will allow his partner to be the barometer of his authenticity, the living litmus test of his alignment with his masculinity! But this is what happens. A man's self-trust enables him to evaluate a woman. And his self-knowledge enables him to recognise the superiority of her emotional attunement. He doesn't feel disempowered by accepting her guidance, any more than a king feels disempowered by respecting the opinions of his advisors. In stage two a man comes to experience the fact that whenever he listens to his partner's emotional wisdom he becomes more present, more alert, more alive. In stage-two a man becomes powerful enough to be humble, and self-loving enough to be open.

It would be impossible for you to hear any of this if you were only-and-totally in stage-zero or stage-one. But actually all of these stages exist simultaneously inside of us. So even while a man is surfing the internet, hungrily lost to himself, from time to time this stage-zero behaviour is interrupted by a stage-one thought like 'why on earth am I doing this? Don't I know from last time what a waste of time it is?' and so on. And even while a man is in stage-one, reclaiming his worth and fighting his wife, arguing as if his life depended on it, from time to time a voice pops up inside him saying 'I know what I am saying isn't true. I know I'm just fabricating ideas in order to fend her off because I just feel so aggressed. Actually, I could let go...'. But it takes a while until these voices are strong enough for us to not only hear the, but act on them. But my point here is this: that even though you might be in stage-zero or one right now, the stage-two man who is already inside you can recognise the possibilities I am describing here.

And what other option is there? We are not going to go back and recreate the patriarchy. We are stuck in the modern era. And women will no longer tolerate the power-over behaviour of the traditional man (nor is she interested in the power-under behaviour of the so-called new man), so in the chess game of the evolution of the genders, the next move falls to the masculine.

It isn't easy, but to retreat into pornography, or any other equivalent escapism and compensation, distances a man further and further from himself, and from the hope of ever truly connecting with a woman. So he must come forward, and offer his partner or wife the natural respect due to her innate feminine sensitivity. And to do this he needs to have found his own deep masculine self-respect. This doesn't happen overnight. This is a journey a man needs to embark upon for himself, and only for himself - regardless of whether or not it will one day equip him to be able to meet a woman heart-to-heart, and power-to-power, or not.

As a man finds himself, he comes to recognise the masculine gifts he brings to relationship - the presence, the strength, the vision, the definition, the creativity, the excitement... He then sees that his partner or wife is his ally, not his enemy. Her emotional wisdom is the gift she brings - and allowing the relationship to be guided by her felt-knowing enriches them both. Rather than fleeing from her into pornography, or elsewhere, he advances towards her with passion and presence. What happens then? He receives from her the life-giving love he seeks, and he offers her in return, the life-giving love she's been waiting for all along.

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