

Men, Pornography 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 a man than the loving openness and acceptance of a woman. The adoration and surrender of a woman fulfils his deepest heart.

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, and 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, and 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 even 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 his heart 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, erotic feminine glow, but which doesn't demand the emotional awareness he can't give.

This is the deeper story behind the proliferation of pornography in the modern age. This is the link between men, pornography and intimacy. For thousands of years, in the traditional patriarchal culture, men at least had the illusion of intimacy. Now they are bereft, and being unable to come out and confess the lack of intimacy in their relationships and how, for the most part, their relationships became almost or completely sexless after the first few years, they are turning inwards and seeking out 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 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 emotional emptiness of his everyday life, he becomes deflated and/or furious, and increasingly alienated, as well as addicted to those porn-full moments when 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 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. And we need to understand 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, the women need to become less compromising. The 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.

From moment to moment the women know just how open or closed the relationship is. They know when there's anger present, when a couple is avoiding each other, and when depth and intimacy is growing. If a man can be man enough to listen to his woman, and let her guide their relationship in this way, then she will warm to him, and open to him, and he will receive what he most longs for. Even her anger is 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 extremely difficult for the fragile male ego to accept all of this, but what other option is there? We are not going to go back and recreate the patriarchy. We are stuck in the modern era. And woman 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 for the lack of woman's love, distances a man further and further from his own heart, and from the hope of ever meeting the heart of a woman. But to come forward, and offer his partner or wife the natural respect due to her innate feminine sensitivity, a man 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 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.

Mark Josephs-Serra ('Joseph'), Totnes, Devon, Oct. 2008

Joseph co-directs The Culture Of Honouring Project with his partner Elisabeth. The project is receiving international acclaim for pioneering a paradigm-shifting approach to gender and relationships. For information on private sessions, weekends and events visit their website at www.cultureofhonouring.co.uk, or call them on 08456 1234 32 (local call rate)