

## ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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### ***What Does It Mean to Be a Man? The Danger of Pornography***

As we begin 2018, I believe it is appropriate to give focus to a critical cultural issue that is destroying men, marriages and contributing in no small way to the denigration of women and children in our society. Several years ago, a local church in Omaha, Nebraska, where I live, asked me to do a presentation on pornography. I called the presentation “Pornography: Adultery of the Heart.” I believe that the pornography crisis in our country has much more to do with what it means to be a man than simply an issue of lust and gross immorality. It is a result of the disastrous lies that our culture promotes about manhood. Joe Ehrmann has summarized those three lies:

1. The first lie of our culture is that real masculinity is determined by athletic ability, which means that you must have the size, strength, and ability to compete against other boys or men and win. Those who have athletic prowess have higher esteem and therefore have more value and worth and are more masculine.
2. The second lie is that being a man is all about sexual conquest. Using women for personal pleasure validates manhood. The more women a man “conquers” the more masculine he is. This is what is at the heart of the playboy philosophy and the *Cosmopolitan* philosophy of Helen Gurley Brown, that magazine’s founder.
3. The third lie has to do with economic success—the size of your salary and the power associated with job titles. The measure of that success and achievement then becomes the things one buys. The man with the more things is the more successful man.

These three lies permeate our culture and define manliness and manhood in the US. These three characteristics (in the form of these lies) are offered in the culture’s models and the media gods viewed on TV and in Hollywood. But what if a man does not have any of these three characteristics or is failing in all three? “He is not then a real man,” says the culture. Ehrmann writes, “We have a country full of boys and men who have been deeply wounded by the culture and deeply wounded in their families due in large part to the problem of fathers who are missing in action.” These men then become violent or become passive and reclusive and then begin to fantasize with pornography—where the woman is always smiling, always welcoming and always “loving.” The woman of pornography never says “no” and is always there for the “taking.” Through the Internet or through magazines or books, men are therefore drawn in and become addicted to this fantasy world of pleasure and acceptance.

Permit me a critical evaluation of the fantasy world pornography creates:

1. This fantasy world of pornography is a clear violation of God's Creation Ordinance (Genesis 2:18-25), which defines the beauty of sex within marriage. Its pleasure and fulfillment are also described in the Song of Solomon. The principles that govern the sexual ethic within marriage are detailed in 1 Corinthians 7:1-7: The principle of mutuality, of mutual duty and of mutual authority. The Bible equally condemns lust as a violation of the sexual ethic laid out by God (e.g., Matthew 5:28; Ephesians 2:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, etc.). Finally, outside of marriage, abstinence is the only viable option for the believer (see Exodus 20:14; 22:16-17; Proverbs 23:27; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:9, 13, 18; Ephesians 5:3, etc.).
2. This fantasy world is made possible by the secularization of our culture, by the emphasis on privatization and autonomy, and by the way in which the media depersonalizes and celebrates the seductive nature to sex. Technology, especially the Internet, permits the privatization of sex and autonomy. It is always there and always available.
3. A word about masturbation. Almost always, masturbation accompanies pornographic activity (addiction). Scripture never directly addresses the issue, but it is possible to apply clear biblical principles. Where masturbation includes lust or desire for someone other than one's spouse, Scripture clearly speaks in the negative. If masturbation prevents a spouse from fulfilling one's duties within marriage, it is wrong. Self-stimulation seems ethically suspect; but within marriage, it seems reasonable to accept its practice under certain circumstances—illness, old age, etc.—i.e., participating with one's marriage partner.
4. What are the effects of pornography?
  - It entices and deceives, never delivering what it promises—intimacy with your spouse.
  - It destroys other-centered, agape love within marriage
  - It degrades and dehumanizes as it becomes addictive
  - It leads to perversion and promiscuity
  - It fosters sexual isolation, not intimacy
  - It can produce rape, marital violence and abuse.
5. What is the road back if one is addicted to pornography?
  - There must be repentance and absolute, daily dependence on God
  - There must be a strategy for holiness (see Ephesians 4:22-24)
  - There must be accountability—one-on-one is preferable
  - For the spouse who has been affected, there must be forgiveness and reconciliation, which often involves counseling.

For those who are married and struggling with pornography, let me recommend, Laurie Hall, *An Affair of the Mind* and Craig Gross, *The Dirty Little Secret: Uncovering the Truth Behind Porn*.

See Joe Ehrmann, "The Greatest Crisis in American Today: The Loss of True Masculinity and Its Devastating Effects on Our Culture," *Veritas* (October 2006), pp. 3-5.