



## The Darkened Eye of Pornography

***"It warps and distorts the beautiful gift of human sexuality, so it no longer serves as an interpersonal force for bonding and building families, but instead devolves into an exploitative and isolating force in the lives of those who fall prey to it."***



The world was shocked when the tragic and twisted case of Ariel Castro burst recently into the lime-light. Before he took his own life in prison earlier this month, he had kidnapped and repeatedly raped, humiliated, and beaten three young women held captive inside his Cleveland house for more than 10 years. At his sentencing in August, he blamed his longstanding habit of watching two to three hours a day of pornography for his crimes: "I believe I am addicted to pornography to a point that it really makes me impulsive and I don't realize what I'm doing is wrong."

To what extent pornography is directly related to violence remains up for debate (explaining any complex human behavior in simple cause and effect terms can be exceedingly difficult). What is beyond dispute is that pornography sets the stage for viewing women in an exploitative way, as sexual fodder for the gratification of men. In fact, the widespread availability and consumption of pornography has arguably become the most pervasive objectifying force in society today.

In a recent newspaper discussion about pornography, one male participant remarked that most men do not end up marrying supermodels, so he thought pornography wasn't a bad thing, since it enabled

"the goods" that a few women possessed to be spread around and shared. He seemed to have no compunction about using women as pawns in the endgame of satisfying male lust.

The gaze we direct towards each other can easily go astray, demeaning not only ourselves, but others around us as well. When one's gaze is directed askance, as Bishop Paul Loverde of Arlington, Virginia, noted in a 2006 letter on pornography, "one becomes the kind of person who is willing to use others as mere objects of pleasure." The impure gaze of pornography, focused on "body parts," or "performances," takes on its own momentum and quickly draws us away from the relational commitments and responsibilities implied in our human sexual nature.

One of the key objections to pornography is that it sets up a fantasy world without the risks and challenges that exist in real relationships. It warps and distorts the beautiful gift of human sexuality, so it no longer serves as an interpersonal force for bonding and building families, but instead devolves into an exploitative and isolating force in the lives of those who fall prey to it, changing its clients, in the words

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of one commentator, into "basement dwellers" and "bottom feeders."

On the other hand, the glance of authentic sexual love, flowing from a pure gaze, avoids denigrating others as a means for self gratification, and draws man and woman into an abiding, life-giving union.

The need for that pure inner gaze has never been more succinctly expressed than in that timeless pronouncement uttered two millennia ago: "Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness" (Luke 11:34).

We see just how dark the darkness was in the life of Ariel Castro. Through pornography addiction, a skyrocketing phenomenon today, our eye easily becomes darkened and shuttered.

This darkness affects not just the men who view it, but also women who may not themselves be regular consumers of pornography. Women may be drawn into the subtle and demeaning trap of objectification when they are pressured to serve as compliant proxies for the acting out of their spouse's hard core porno-

graphic fantasies. Instead of relating to the actual person they are with, they may instead feel obligated to play a role in satisfying various desires and fetishes. In this way, pornography may impact the way consensual relationships develop between men and women, weaving a warped and exploitative element into the early stages of the relationship.

The average woman may also struggle with a sense of inadequacy when it comes to competing with or measuring up to the naked women of the internet, particularly in the face of pervasive airbrushing, silicone implants and photoshopping of porn models. These concerns about undue pressure on women apply not just to the pornography industry but even to the modern fashion industry with its frequently provocative designs, and to the numerous soft porn initiatives such as the Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition. It should come as no surprise when ordinary women and girls manifest loathing and abusive tendencies towards their own bodies, when they feel threatened by impossible comparisons and expectations.

The enduring glance, sparked by the sexual attractiveness of the other, is never meant to be directed askance by the vicious snare of pornography, but

instead to point towards a personal and committed marital love, purified of exploitative and objectifying tendencies.

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