

The secret life of cyberporn

Sandra Kimball confronts the enemy of eros



For better or worse, we live in an emerging culture of porn. What used to be available “out there,” a secret stash, tactile and tucked away, is now only a mouse click away. And there isn’t a prison guard more alert or tireless than a compelling secret taste for porn. Evidenced by the hundreds of websites and articles arguing for and against, exploring its causes, casting blame and expounding cures, I know many people are worried. It’s an unresolved social anxiety. I was a little reluctant to add to the pile of information this topic generates, but as more and more clients told tales of furtive on-line sex lives that left them at the mercy of an ever-widening gap between their actual identity and a virtually-created one, I was curious to know what it is they actually get out of it. So together with my clients, I began an investigation.

Entering into the world of cyberporn, you step out of yourself, transcend the boundaries of who you think you are and who you are in relation to your partner and family. Porn has an “itchy” quality to it; a prurient curiosity to know what is concealed or what can be conquered. Itching carries with it, a sense of acute necessity to know about something by what it does to you, with no mystery, no unknown quantity presented by a real, live “other.” Clients report that it is sometimes safer to feel lustful with a screen-size person who they don’t know or care much about. The anonymity can provide protection from unexamined feelings of entrapment, inadequacy, and even the loss of self. The opportunity is there to experience a sense of freedom and the lack of it existing side by side. But the end result is that cyberporn produces a kind of brittle passionlessness. You settle into a habit of a repetitive sexual expression limited to visual stimuli and response. Cyberporn gets in the way of being in touch with ordinary and extraordinary eros.

Eros has primarily and predominately come to mean sexual passion, but it is much more complex than that. It has been trivialized and confused with its opposite – pornography. Pornography

and eroticism are diametrically opposed. In Plato’s *Symposium*, he connects eros not only with sexual love but also with philosophizing and our desires for beauty, wisdom, and even immortality. Eros is our ally in several ways. Besides sharing deeply satisfying sexual experiences with another person, it moves in me when I am carried away by exquisite music, when examining and sharing a new and fascinating idea with someone, or when my body and mind open to the beauty of nature after periods of intensive meditation. These activities evoke the deepest feelings that naturally lead to joy and lessen the threat of difference between others and myself.

We’re accustomed to living in an anti-erotic culture where we are socialized to control ourselves and to restrain our impulses. Yet at the same time, we are encouraged to be intensity junkies, wanting more variety and more stimulation that provides instant gratification. We are less and less tolerant of any signs of frustration, and more and more likely to be externally defined. Sex is just another commodity and we are the consumers. When out of touch with eros, we use others as objects of satisfaction and we lose the joy of satisfying another.

In Japanese art, one of my favorite ink paintings, by an unknown 17th century artist, is “Daruma and the Courtesan.” Playing with ambiguity, it shows a sheepish looking Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen in Japan, with a beautiful young woman standing behind him with her hands resting gently on his head. This painting hints at an important link between the sensual and the spiritual. It reminds me of the psychological maxim that what is repressed, returns. Or as the French saying goes, *Chassez le naturel, il revient au gallop* (Chase away the natural, and it comes back at a gallop).

When cyberporn is taking a large share of attention in someone’s life, vitality can slowly begin to evaporate. In a counselling environment free from judgment and moralizing, clients can open up to exploring their beliefs and assumptions that may be preventing the spontaneous

expression of eros in their lives. Then there can be a natural flow-on effect that expands the possibilities of shaping sexuality in a new and more satisfying way. Cyberporn may be anxiety-free and may not require you to think about anyone else, but the sexual expression is muted, limited, and solitary.

Following eros is learning how to use desire, instead of being used by it. It has the energy to sensitize and strengthen all our experiences with the end result being an appreciation of beauty and a heightened awareness of how much we need each other to make freedom possible. **KTO**

For counselling and psychotherapy, contact Sandra Kimball, Counselling Services Kansai 075-762-6322 or www.internationalcounselling.com

LETTERS

I have an elementary school age son with my Japanese wife, and recently he’s started refusing to speak English with us. Of course, we had hoped to raise a perfectly bilingual child, but we’ve started to become a bit concerned. Do you think this is just a phase or something we should be more worried about? DAVID J., BY EMAIL

I don’t think this is something to be too worried about unless it’s a symptom of something deeper unsettling him. Continue to speak to him in English and let him answer in Japanese if he wants to, as long as you understand what he is saying and communication is happening between you. Most likely he will take an interest in speaking English again in the future. And when the motivation is born from his interest, he will easily learn what he needs to know to become perfectly bilingual. It might also be important to initiate a discussion with him about what is going on in his life at home, school, and with friends. Perhaps there is something that is causing him to reject the non-Japanese side of himself and it’s showing up in his reluctance to speak English.