

ON PORNOGRAPHY EFFECTS

Published March 16, 2006 in *The Catholic Sun* as *Humanly Possible* column

Making good sexual choices (part 2) by Monica Hidalgo Breaux, PhD, MSW

**pull quote: "Looking at pornography blinds us to the presence of God in human beings."*

"Every time I look at you I go blind." These lyrics always make me think of pornography. Human beings hunger for attention and acceptance. We are social creatures with a genuine need for help from others to maintain a clear understanding that our life has meaning and purpose. Pope Benedict XVI explains in his encyclical "God is Love" how we are each called to gaze into the soul of other people, knowing "I can give them the look of love which they crave."

Looking at pornography blinds us to the presence of God in human beings. It trains us to focus on their body parts, dehumanizing them. We soon become slaves to our sexual appetite. Our freedom to desire what is truly good for us gets more and more limited as our sinful choice turns into a habit then an obsession and a compulsion. We select people in the pornographic pictures for our personal slaves. We do not think of their hunger, their wounds, their need for our genuine love and concern. We use them for personal pleasure and to escape the pain of our own loneliness and hunger for love. This slaveholder attitude creeps into our relationship skills. Soon our family and friends notice the change in us as we lose a sense of our own personal value and dignity. We go blind to the goodness within us, believing we are bad and unlovable.

Brain scientists testified to the Senate that pornography is potent, addictive and permanently implanted in the brain. They explained that looking at pornography for only three-tenths of a second causes the brain to change in a way that can be measured by technology. Scientists refer to these physical and chemical changes as damage to the brain. They testified that there are no studies and no data to prove any benefit from using pornography. One expert said, "If pornography made us healthy, we would be healthy by now." Instead, interest in online pornography causes more than half of all divorces according to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. The harmful effect of divorce on our children is well documented.

The Internet offers adults and children the greatest access to pornography. Recently, a local Catholic high school senior surveyed 100 teenagers for an ethics essay contest. Most of them admitted to owning pornographic magazines and videos and all of them confessed to viewing it.

Recently I spent a few days at St. Louis University High School inviting the students to give up pornography for Lent. Some of them questioned whether sexual addiction is real. Lent is the perfect opportunity to prove that you have not lost self-control. You can try to give up your attachments to food, alcohol, drugs, gossip (framed as prayer requests), pornography, chat rooms, shopping, speeding, criticism, video gaming, violent movies, or working long hours. By Easter, you will know if you have an addiction, because if you do, you will be full of resentment.

Pope John Paul II taught us that resentment is spiritual laziness -- "a sadness that the good is difficult." Yes, it is difficult to be good people and to do good things. We cling to our hurts because it is such a bummer to go through the very hard work of forgiveness. In his book, "Love and Responsibility," he wrote, "resentment outlaws chastity from the soul, the will and the heart." Resentment blocks us from pure and chaste friendship that can satisfy our heart's desire for human connection. It is not easy, especially today, but chastity is humanly possible.