

# Trend Alert!

# PORNOGRAPHY AS ART

By Jason Soucinek



**SEXUAL INTEGRITY  
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## Trend Alert: Pornography As Art

Never before has pornography been as accessible as it is today. I was reminded of this fact last week as *Paper* magazine tried to “break the Internet” with images of Kim Kardashian showing her backside on the front cover and going fully nude on the inside. Many have celebrated and praised the magazine and Mrs. Kardashian for these “tasteful” images. But we have to ask the question: How is this any different than *Playboy* which, as of this writing, is still considered pornography?

In our oversexed world it is becoming easier and easier to pass these images off as art. No longer is sex or nudity something we reserve for the bedroom but rather it is seen as something to be exploited and treated as a commodity. In the instance of Kim Kardashian what seems to keep these images from becoming x-rated is the photographer who took them, Jean-Paul Goode. Goode is famous for his work, which is featured in museums around the world, making Kim Kardashian more of a muse and icon than someone posing naked for a magazine.

Over the years magazines have rarely shied away from gratuitous nudity. Jennifer Aniston, Miley Cyrus, Zoe Saldana, and even pregnant Demi Moore have taken it all off, though with creative placement covering up important parts. While nudity in the public forum is nothing new, the public discourse on whether or not this is pornographic has all but disappeared, even as the frequency of these images has increased.

A similar thought passed my mind this last summer when Keira Knightley posed topless for *Interview* magazine. She is most famous for her starring role in the “Pirates of the Caribbean” movies. Her desire was to show the public what she “really” looked like. She was tired of having her body manipulated by airbrushing and wanted to share an image free of editing. At the time she said, “OK, I’m fine doing the topless shot so long as you don’t make them any bigger or retouch.” She went on to say, “I think women’s bodies are a battleground and photography is partly to blame. Our society is photographic now.” And she’s right, we do live in a photographic society, which is the reason it becomes important to clearly define “porn.”



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Historically, most dictionaries define pornography as printed or visual material whose primary purpose is to cause sexual arousal. Groups like Fight the New Drug share how pornography rewires the brain, heart, and ultimately the way we engage in relationship with the world around us. Harvest USA says that pornography is anything the heart uses to find sexual expression outside of God's intended design for relational intimacy. For all of my life, my parent's life, and my grandparent's life that has been true of pornography, until now.

Britannica online points out that porn is defined by society:

*Because the very definition of pornography is subjective, a history of pornography is nearly impossible to conceive; imagery that might be considered erotic or even religious in one society may be condemned as pornographic in another. Thus, European travelers to India in the 19th century were appalled by what they considered pornographic representations of sexual contact and intercourse on Hindu temples; most modern observers would probably react differently. Many contemporary Muslim societies likewise apply the label "pornography" to many motion pictures and television programs that are unobjectionable in Western societies. To adapt a cliché, pornography is very much in the eye of the beholder.*

That is exactly what we find happening here in the United States. Magazines like *Paper* and *Interview* are changing the way we think about pornography by labeling it art. But in reality this is pornography. Or, to be more exact, this is soft-core pornography, which is sexually explicit images that are ubiquitously found in advertising. Dr. Gary Brooks, a psychologist at Texas A&M, has published many articles on the harmful effects of pornography and in particular, soft-core pornography. He states, "The problem with soft-core pornography is that it's voyeurism – it teaches men to view women as objects rather than to be in relationships with women as human beings." According to Brooks, pornography gives men the false impression that sex and pleasure are entirely divorced from relationships.

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The sad truth is that soft-core pornography, like the images of Kim Kardashian and Keira Knightley, are appearing now more than ever before. If you disagree that these images are art you're labeled a prude or someone who lacks the ability to see this for the beauty the rest of the advertising world says it is. That is one reason we do not see much discourse on this in the public sphere.

Interestingly, three years ago she was crying on the shoulder of her mother, Kris Jenner, on the show "Kourtney and Kim Take New York" after a *W* magazine spread came out and she was unexpectedly naked saying, "You can see my nipples, you can see my asscrack." She did agree to be naked, though she was supposed to have been painted silver with objects digitally covering her privates. When the magazine was published she found something very different exclaiming, "Oh, my god, I look more naked than I did in *Playboy*." In fact, she goes on to share how she wanted to be known for something more than her naked body. Well, it's obvious she changed her

mind...much like the rest of the United States is changing its mind about how pornography is defined.

We need to be alert to the desensitization of how we view pornographic images. As pornography is being redefined by advertisers, we need to also remember what science and research shows it to be, a force that is destructive and changes the way we see others. In an effort to counter some of what we see in our media, it is important we take the following steps with our kids and ourselves:

**Clearly define what pornography is.** As our society begins to change how it perceives and defines images like those of Kim Kardashian and Keira Knightley, it is important that parents and churches don't do the same. One of the clearer definitions comes from Tim Chester in his book *Closing the Window*. He says anything we use for sexual titillation, gratification, or escape, whether it is intended for that purpose or not, is pornographic.

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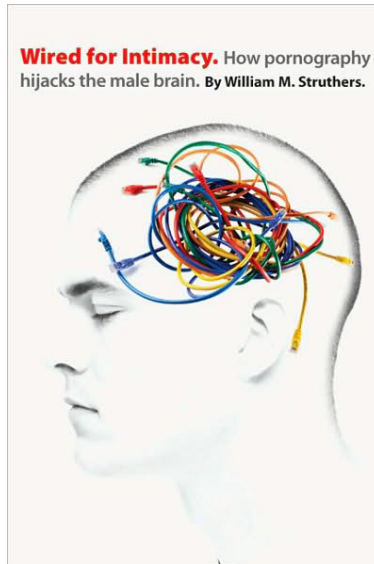
**Understand the impact that pornography has on our culture.** We have to start being honest with the fact that pornography is rewiring our brain. In his book *Wired for Intimacy* Dr. William Struthers says:

*As men fall deeper into the mental habit of fixating on [pornographic images], the exposure to them creates neural pathways. Like a path is created in the woods with each successive hiker, so do the neural paths set the course for the next time an erotic image is viewed. Over time these neural paths become wider as they are repeatedly traveled with each exposure to pornography. They become the automatic pathway through which interactions with woman are routed....They have unknowingly created a neurological circuit that imprisons their ability to see women rightly as created in God's image.*

**Realize that we are made for relationship.** Scripture tells us that we are made in the image of God. We are created to be in relationship with Him and others, just like He is in relationship with Himself through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But pornography demeans and objectifies others. It causes us to see the other as someone who is there to meet our needs. Research shows that when we are exposed to pornography, it becomes more difficult to be aroused by a real person or relationship.

**Recognize that pornography distorts God's design for sex.** Whether they want to or not, the majority of teens are getting some of their sex-ed from pornography. Researchers have repeatedly found that people who have seen a significant amount of porn are more likely to start having sex sooner and with more partners, and to engage in riskier kinds of sex. Sex is meant to unite two people. It is meant to lead to children and it is meant to recall, and even reenact, the promise that God makes to us and that we make to one another in the marriage vow. Pornography promises only to leave us lonely, empty, and unfulfilled.

**Don't believe pornography is something we just have to accept.** Although the number of images has increased over the last few years we should not think it is ever okay. Porn is never part of a normal and healthy relationship. As more and more data shows the negative impact images like these have on the brain and heart, the more important it becomes to educate our youth and young adults to push back.



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For more information on today's youth culture, visit the website of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding at [www.cpyu.org](http://www.cpyu.org).

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