

YOUTH AND A PASTORAL RESPONSE TO PORNOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Despite age laws on the access of pornography, teenagers are frequently and profoundly exposed to the materials. Some will be linked to Internet websites by extraneous search results or pop-up windows. Others will be exposed through film, television, or print media. What may begin as idle curiosity can quickly become a deeper problem of addiction.

The general format of the following is to describe some of the issues at play with the problem of pornography and teens with resources to address the issues at the end of each section.

WHEN IT'S AN ADDICTION

Society long has recognized the threat of teen addiction to drugs and alcohol. The threat of addiction to pornography is one that makes adults uncomfortable. In addition, we are part of an addicted or addictive society.

Addiction to pornography begins innocuously enough for most teens, but ends with the serious ramifications that any addiction brings. Usually it can start with an innocent encounter such as comments at school, something a friend's older sibling has hidden. Curiosity can turn to a thrill. The thrill of the emotions, which are not easily controlled by a developing teenager, and the thrill of getting away with something they (hopefully) know to be wrong contribute. The tendency is for boys to have a higher likelihood of becoming addicted with girls either acquiescing or following in order to fit in with the boys.

CCC #2414

The seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason - selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian - lead to the *enslavement of human beings*, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord."

Resources and Ideas:

- ♦ *Sex, Love and the Believing Boy*. Chapter on masturbation (Is it wrong if it doesn't hurt anyone?). By John H. McGoey, Fidelity House.

Parental Denial

A great challenge to combating the negative effects of pornography on teenagers is the naiveté or denial of parents. Whether the contention is that their children are too good to

even touch pornography or complete denial of a well-proven addiction, the attitude of the parent will greatly affect the issue at hand. It is crucial to minister as much to and with the adult parents/guardians as with the teen suffering from pornography's effects.

CCC #2221, 2223-5

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by *creating a home* where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for *education in the virtues*. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. [CCC 2224, in part.]

Resources Ideas:

- ♦ *Love and Life: Parents' Guide Section III*. Tom and Judy Lickona, Ave Maria Press. Love and Life Distortions, 10 negative effects on wholesome development.
- ♦ *20 Tough Questions Teenagers Ask*, Paulist Press.

SELF-IDENTITY

One of the fundamental tasks a teenager faces in their development is creating a self-identity. This process is one that takes years, is occasionally difficult, and is open to many influences.

Self-esteem

A fragile component of the teen's self-identity is self-esteem. A constant struggle occurs between identity and social acceptability. A need to be accepted, part of a group is common if not universal among teens. A corruption in this need can occur when teens will allow exposure to pornography in order to be accepted. The rebellious component of doing something wrong can help with this creation of self-strength and group identity.

CCC #356

Of all visible creatures only man is "able to know and love his creator". He is "the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake", and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity:

What made you establish man in so great a dignity? Certainly the incalculable love by which you have looked on your creature in yourself! You are taken with love for her; for by love indeed you created her, by love you have given her a being capable of tasting your eternal Good

Resources and Ideas:

- ♦ *What Is So Important about Self-Esteem*. Kieran Sawyer, Ave Maria Press.
- ♦ 1 Corinthians 12 and the giftedness of each person
- ♦ Group Retreats on self-identity and belonging, Group Publishing. [Book?]
- ♦ Matthew 13:44-46 discussion asking the implications that the person who bought the field and pearl of great price was God and we are the treasure.
- ♦ *Theology of the Body for Teens*, Ascension Press. Self-Esteem section.

- ◆ Community service opportunities that call forth the giftedness of individuals while creating positive group dynamics.
- ◆ *Becoming a Woman*, Valerie Vance Dillion, XXIII Publications.
- ◆ “Signs of Love,” *Vine and Branches II*, discussion guide for short film *Johnny Lingo*, St. Mary’s Press.
- ◆ Non-competitive community building activities.
- ◆ “What Is So Important about Self-Esteem,” *Life Strategies for Catholic Teens*, Kieran Sawyer, Ave Maria Press.
- ◆ *Who Am I?* Group Retreat Book
- ◆ *God’s Bod* Group Retreat Book
- ◆ *Catholic Youth Bible*, St. Mary’s Press. Index includes related topics of sexuality, pornography, self-image, and other references.
- ◆ *Awakening: Challenging the Culture with Girls*, Janet Claussen, St. Mary’s Press.
- ◆ *True Love IV: Relationships*, Media Pro.
- ◆ *A Case for Chastity*, Heather Gallagher and Peter Vlahutin, Ligori Publishing.

Confused Sense of Empowerment

For teens striving to establish their identity to themselves and their community, sexuality becomes a tool to exert power over others. Much of the popular culture that surrounds teens exalts and exploits sexuality in both covert and overt manners. By setting that example, teens come to view their sexuality as a means to have acceptance, power, and control.

CCC #1930

Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy. If it does not respect them, authority can rely only on force or violence to obtain obedience from its subjects. It is the Church's role to remind men of good will of these rights and to distinguish them from unwarranted or false claims.

Resources and Ideas:

- ◆ *Relational Youth Ministry*, Marc C. McCann, St. Mary’s Press.
- ◆ *A Companion Way, Mentoring Youth in Searching Faith*, John M. Vitek, St. Mary’s Press.

Courage to Stay Strong

The effects of peer pressure and even of an individual teen’s emotions are well known. The courage to stay strong when faced with the pressures of friends, acquaintances, even strangers is quite difficult. This becomes more pronounced when the emotions normal to teenage development cloud more rational thought processes. We need to encourage and foster the ability of teens to stay strong in the face of external and internal pressures.

CCC #2744

Prayer is a vital necessity. Proof from the contrary is no less convincing: if we do not allow the Spirit to lead us, we fall back into the slavery of sin. How can the Holy Spirit be our life if our heart is far from him?

Nothing is equal to prayer; for what is impossible it makes possible, what is difficult, easy. . . . For it is impossible, utterly impossible, for the man who prays eagerly and invokes God ceaselessly ever to sin.

Those who pray are certainly saved; those who do not pray are certainly damned.

Resources and Ideas:

- ◆ Youth friendly experience of Reconciliation
- ◆ *Juno* – a movie discussion.
- ◆ *Life Strategies for Catholics*, Jim Auer, Ligouri Publishing.
- ◆ *Keys to Happiness*, Anna Scally, Cornerstone Media.
- ◆ *True Love Video Series III: Setting Boundaries, Refusal Skills*, Media Pro.
- ◆ *A Case for Chastity*, Heather Gallagher and peter Vlahutin. Chapter on Starting Over and How to Beat the Past.
- ◆ *What's Up with Abstinence*, Channing and Bete.
- ◆ *Next Time I Fall in Love*, Chap Clark, Zondervan. Chapters on Self-Esteem and Sex & Intimacy.
- ◆ *Unmasking Sexual Con Games*, Boystown Press.

The Role of Media

There is no masking the role that the vast quantity of media available to teens plays in the formation of self-identity. Media portrays a very sexually liberal, easily accessible, and frequently anonymous venue for teens. The Internet provides a challenge as the sheer quantity of sites work against an idea of a strong self-identity and a resistance to the lure of pornography. Advertisements, MySpace videos, music videos, and even prime time television create an environment that exploits sexuality and inoculates against the recognition that pornography is harmful. The breadth, depth, and technical complexities of the media component of pornography lets adults feel that there is no way to deal with the problem, or that it is not their responsibility as they simply do not know how to approach it.

CCC #2494

The information provided by the media is at the service of the common good. Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, justice, and solidarity:

The proper exercise of this right demands that the content of the communication be true and - within the limits set by justice and charity - complete. Further, it should be communicated honestly and properly. This means that in the gathering and in the publication of news, the moral law and the legitimate rights and dignity of man should be upheld.

Resources and Ideas:

- ◆ *Faith & the Media: Surveying Sex in the Media*, Kieran Sawyer, Ave Maria Press.
- ◆ Philippians 4:8-9
- ◆ Discuss as a group what it means to be cool. Create a definition. Discuss how pornography does not fit into that definition.

- ♦ *Let's Talk to Teens about Chastity*, Molly Kelly, Center for Learning. Chapter 6: The Safe Sex Myth.
- ♦ *True Love Video Series VI: Media Message*, Media Pro.
- ♦ *More Group Retreat Book*, Group. Chapter: Shaping Teens' Views of Sexuality.

MODESTY

Modesty is a term that is countercultural and difficult to put into practice. The media informs the peer group on what is attractive and sought after, usually without thought to modesty. The retailers, designers, and marketers of clothing do little to aid in the pursuit of age-appropriate modesty.

CCC #2522

Modesty protects the mystery of persons and their love. It encourages patience and moderation in loving relationships; it requires that the conditions for the definitive giving and commitment of man and woman to one another be fulfilled. Modesty is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing. It keeps silence or reserve where there is evident risk of unhealthy curiosity. It is discreet.

Resources and Ideas:

- ♦ Offer a modesty fashion show that demonstrates how modesty does require a disregard of fashion and trends.
- ♦ Provide opportunities to discuss modesty as a group and as smaller gender groups. Divide the group by gender. Ask the boys what they think when girls dress showing considerable amounts of skin. Ask the girls what they think about boys when they do the same. After discussing relevant subtopics, bring the group together to compare answers. Look at how these differing viewpoints can impact relationships.

PERSONAL FORMATION

With so many influences offering instruction to teens on how to develop their self-identity, morality, and overall character personal formation becomes a crucial component to preventing and healing the hurt of pornography. In particular this encompasses a proactive welcoming of youth into the Church as active and full members of the community. Thus giving them a safe environment in which to develop. Formation needs to include the spiritual development, scriptural support, the imperative we all have to place God first, and the consolation that is offered by the truth. As we strive to welcome the youth into the Church, we need to look at the means to do this. They include youth groups, sports activities, service projects, and even the Internet. Once they are connected, the responsibility comes to compassionately help form their consciences to counteract the attitude that simply not being caught means it is not wrong.

CCC #1785

Man is sometimes confronted by situations that make moral judgments less assured and decision difficult. But he must always seriously seek what is right and good and discern the will of God expressed in divine law.

Resources and Ideas:

- ♦ Matthew 14:22-33 – reflect on keeping Jesus as focus in order to rise above the negative pressures of society around us.
- ♦ *True Love Waits*, National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry resources.
- ♦ *Sex, Love & You*, Judy Lickona and William Boudreau, Ave Maria Press. Chapter 15: What Is Chastity and Chapter 16: How Can I Be Chaste?
- ♦ Utilize overnight retreats as an essential way to focus on spirituality and community building.
- ♦ Offer regular gatherings of youth for formation, community building, prayer, and pastoral guidance. *Renewing the Vision* must be read, understood, and implemented in every parish.
- ♦ *What's Right, What's Wrong*, Kieran Sawyer, Ave Maria Press.
- ♦ *Guarding the Fire*, Good Group Press. Textbook on spirituality for young men. Chapter 2: Images of Manhood, Chapter 4: Sexuality and Intimacy, Chapter 5: Friendship and Belonging.
- ♦ *Building a Conscience*, RCL. Text on morality.

RELATIONAL AND COMMUNAL DEVELOPMENT

Frequently pornography appeals to those that do not have a strong sense of community with their peers or good relational skills. Pornography will then serve as a surrogate, replacing healthy interaction. Conversely, some teenagers may look to porn as a means with the rationale that it is the closest you can get to having sex without really having to have sex. There is a deceptive sense of security and anonymity to pornography. This again leads us to understand the importance as Church in creating healthy environments and communities for teens to participate in on a regular basis.

CCC #1253

Baptism is the sacrament of faith. But faith needs the community of believers. It is only within the faith of the Church that each of the faithful can believe. The faith required for Baptism is not a perfect and mature faith, but a beginning that is called to develop. The catechumen or the godparent is asked: "What do you ask of God's Church?" The response is: "Faith!"

Resources and Ideas:

- ♦ *Vine and Branches II*, St. Mary's Press. "Celebrate You, Celebrate Me."
- ♦ *Vine and Branches III*, St. Mary's Press. "No Greater Love."
- ♦ *Group Retreat Book*, Group Publishing. "Let's Be Friends."
- ♦ *Love and Relationships: God's Plan*, Thomas Finn, Hi-Time Publishing.
- ♦ *Love and Life*, Colleen Mast. Unit 2: The Building Blocks of Love and Life.
- ♦ *Hot Topics*, Group Publishing. Chapter: Anonymity.
- ♦ *Theology of the Body for Teens*, Ascension Press. "Authentic Love."
- ♦ *Sex, Love, and the Believing Boy*, John McGovey, Fidelity House.
- ♦ *Teen To Teens*, Bob McCarty, St. Mary's Press. Qualities of healthy relationships.
- ♦ *Faith Works*, Lisa Calderone Stewart, St. Mary's Press. Chapter 1: Friend or Foe.
- ♦ Sirach 6

- ◆ *Horizons*, St. Mary's Press. *Dating and Love*, Michael Theisen.
- ◆ *Love and Relationships, God's Plan for Human Sexuality*, Finn and Finn, Hi-Time Publishing. A teen retreat.
- ◆ *Sexuality and Dating, A Christian Perspective*, Richard Reichart, St. Mary's Press.
- ◆ *Growing Toward Intimacy*, Bob Bartlett, Good Ground Press.

Trust

At other points, trust in others may be eroded causing a teen to retreat away from healthy interpersonal relationships into pornography. They may be recovering from betrayal or otherwise seeking comfort. The message of love and hope offered by the Gospel and which serves as a foundation to youth ministry answers this need

CCC #1851

It is precisely in the Passion, when the mercy of Christ is about to vanquish it, that sin most clearly manifests its violence and its many forms: unbelief, murderous hatred, shunning and mockery by the leaders and the people, Pilate's cowardice and the cruelty of the soldiers, Judas' betrayal - so bitter to Jesus, Peter's denial and the disciples' flight. However, at the very hour of darkness, the hour of the prince of this world, the sacrifice of Christ secretly becomes the source from which the forgiveness of our sins will pour forth inexhaustibly.

Resources and Ideas:

- ◆ Sirach 6 – reflect on those qualities and people in which we should place our trust.
- ◆ *Catholic Youth Bible*, St. Mary's Press. Under the index listing for 'trust' are several items of interest.

CONCLUSION

No matter the origins or causes of a youth's involvement with pornography, it is absolutely essential to address the problem in a compassionate manner. While helping to resolve the sin, it is crucial to love the sinner. Responding to the whole person looking to the physical, spiritual, and relational issues will help to ensure a lasting, positive change.