Office for Protection of Children

Archdiocese of Dubuque

1229 Mt. Loretta • P.O. Box 479 • Dubuque, Iowa 52004-0479
Phone (563) 556-2580 FAX (563) 556-5464
Email: dbqcopc@arch.pvt.k12.ia.us
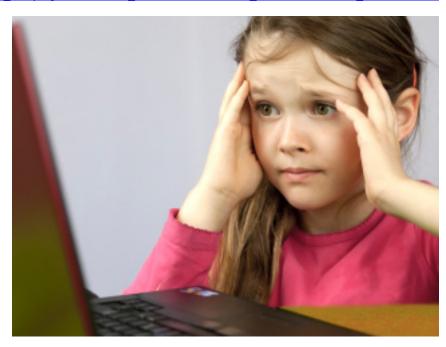
Pornography Consuming Our Children

This article is a collaborative effort between Luke Gilkerson from Covenant Eyes and the VIRTUS® Programs Associate Director, Crispin Ketelhut.
http://www.covenanteyes.com/?utm_campaign=Virtus&utm_content=catholic&utm_medium=web&utm_source=article

Never before in the history of telecommunications media in the United States has so much indecent (and obscene) material been so easily accessible by so many minors in so many American homes with so few restrictions.
—U.S. Department of Justice[1]

Does this sound applicable to our current culture? It was actually a warning from a U.S. Justice Department memo from 1996, even before wireless broadband, smart phones and tablets.

Reality

The statistics of today are frightening. *(click below to see statistics)*

http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/?utm_campaign=Virtus&utm_content=catholic&utm_medium=web&utm_source=article

The largest consumers of Internet pornography are children between the ages of 12-17. More than half of boys and a third of girls have seen pornography before their teenage years. Thirty-five percent of young teenage boys (13-14 years old) say that they have seen pornography "more times than I can count." By the age of 18, more than nine out of 10 boys, and six out of 10 girls have seen pornography online.[2] Pornography also contributes to the sexual trafficking of minors, as victims become part of the pool of videos and images circulated online.[3] There are also grave neurological effects. As one can imagine, viewing graphic and degrading material can negatively impact a person's thinking in profound ways. This is even truer when a person's brain is still in its most formative stages-as is the case with teens and preteens.[4]

Perhaps most sobering of all is the fact that children who have seen pornography, even inadvertently, are more likely to be sexually abused by a peer or adult.[5]

As is denoted in the pastoral letter of Bought With A Price (http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/uploadedFiles/Library/docs/Communications/Letters_from_Bishop_Loverde/Bought_with_a_Price.pdf), pornography has spread like a plague through our culture, affecting the souls of men, women and children, and victimizing the most vulnerable among us.[6] There is a plethora of evidence that pornography and sexualized material influence moral values, sexual activity and sexual attitudes toward sexual violence. *And it is not going away.*

The Haven of Secrecy
Through TV, movies, wireless communication and the Internet, we find ourselves with almost unlimited access to pornography. There is also the heightened sense of secrecy involved in using pornography, which is why researchers believe it has become even more widespread. Many call this the "Online Disinhibition Effect." Safely behind the anonymity of a computer screen or smartphone, people feel freer to do, say, and experience what runs against their values in the "real world."[7] This is especially true for children and teens.

A Comprehensive Solution: Communication and Accountability
The best defense against allowing pornography to reach our children is to stop it before it begins, or to address it immediately. Whether we are parents or caring adults, we need to train children to become responsible Internet users. Below are some tips on how to foster a healthy environment of online accountability and communication in the home and other environments:

- Discussion: One of the best tools is communication. Dr. Patricia Greenfield from UCLA has spent decades studying the impact of sexual media on the mind. Her words to parents are noteworthy: "A warm and communicative parent-child relationship is the most important non-technical means that parents can use to deal with the challenges of the sexualized media environment." Adults should be willing and open to discussing the websites family members visit and have regular conversations about the sexual messages communicated online. For a helpful guide, consider viewing UNFILTERED: Equipping Parents for an Ongoing Conversation About Internet Pornography, a recorded parent workshop that addresses how to have this conversation.

- Establish expectations, such as the location of Internet usage: Internet use in the home should always take place in a common area, such as a family room, and not in the privacy of a bedroom. Technology controls should be a routine part of media use through computers and smart phones, exhibited and modeled by all persons within the family, including the adults.

- Use technology to your advantage: Have you given much thought as to how many Internet-enabled devices are in your home or ministry environment? Take stock and make use of the technology that is available to have control over the

devices children use to access the Internet. This is also true for the adults who monitor devices used in public settings, such as a school.

- Create a review system: Are you aware that teens spend an average of five hours a day online and often remove the evidence trail of visited websites? A recent survey from McAfee showed that 53 percent of teens have cleared browser history to hide Internet activity from their parents and 46 percent of teens have minimized a browser window to hide online activity (and only 17-18 percent of parents are aware teens do this).[8] Parents need to be able to have informed discussions about Internet habits, which includes the good and the bad. This means regularly looking at the sites children visit-and having a system that will account for the sites children erase.

- Install accountability and filtering software: Install a comprehensive control software suite that includes both accountability and filtering. It is not enough to simply have content filters for computers. Internet filters are important tools for preventing inadvertent exposure to pornography, but the ultimate goal is to raise young men and women who will hold themselves accountable and be their own watchdogs online. If you conduct an online search, you will find several software options on the market (including Covenant Eyes) with filtering capability to block objectionable websites, and accountability services to monitor and email regular reports of questionable websites, searches, and information accessed by each user. It can be as strict or flexible as you determine is necessary and reduces some of the challenges of managing all the technological aspects of controlling access.

This is a battle worth fighting. As caring adults, it is our privilege and responsibility to protect children from access to pornography, which begins with communication and is fortified by a prudential control of media available within the home and throughout our ministry.

References
[1]U.S. Department of Justice. Post Hearing Memorandum of Points and Authorities, at I, ACLU v. Reno, 929 F. Supp. 824 (1996)
[2]Covenant Eyes. Pornography Statistics: Annual Report 2014. Accessed from the Internet March 19, 2014. http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/?utm_campaign=Virtus&utm_content=catholic&utm_medium=web&utm_source=article
[3]Shared Hope International. The National Report on Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children (2009). Accessed from the Internet March 19, 2014. http://sharedhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/SHI_National_Report_on_DMST_2009.pdf \
[4]Covenant Eyes. The Porn Circuit. Accessed from the Internet March 19, 2014. http://www.covenanteyes.com/science-of-porn-addiction-ebook/?utm_campaign=Virtus&utm_content=catholic&utm_medium=web&utm_source=article
[5]Covenant Eyes. Pornography Statistics: Annual Report 2014.
[6]Most Rev. Paul S. Loverde, Bishop of Arlington. Bought With A Price. (2014) Accessed from the Internet March 19, 2014. http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/purity/pastoral_letter.aspx
[7]John Suler. The Psychology of Cyberspace: The Online Disinhibition Effect. Accessed from the Internet March 19, 2014. http://truecenterpublishing.com/psycyber/disinhibit.html
[8]McAfee. The Digital Divide: How the Online Behavior of Teens is Getting Past Parents. (2012) Accessed from the Internet March 19, 2014. http://www.mcafee.com/us/resources/misc/digital-divide-study.pdf