

YOUNG ADULTS AND A PASTORAL RESPONSE TO PORNOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Whether through a stumble on the Internet, a dorm mate's magazine, or a film from a friend, young adults are frequently exposed to pornographic material. Most will ignore it, some may glance in curiosity, others will begin an unfortunate journey towards addiction. The challenges of a positive, healthy, and hopeful response to pornography become compounded by the challenges of ministering to and with young adults as a whole. Classic ministry options of gathered meetings in the parish hall are infrequently effective. New technologies lead to formation of community and even church in forms quite foreign to many attempting to minister to young adults. Thus, it is important to not only address the issues of pornography, but to do so in a manner that will appeal and be relevant to young adults.

The following highlights many of the major components of the problem of pornography. Many factors contribute to the lure of pornography and in many cases, the eventual addiction to it. These can loosely be grouped by societal factors and personal or individual factors. Some overlap, and few are ever the sole reason for the draw of pornography.

PART ONE

Media CCC 2496

Today we are faced with more forms of media than ever before in an almost constant stream. The sheer quantity of information often prohibits us from noticing the quality of that content. From television, to radio, to film, to publications, to Internet media, this leads us to often accept that which we should more carefully critique or reject.

In our visual media we face carefully crafted images of people that lead to a warped sense of self. Whether it is the physical appearance we are indoctrinated to strive for or the type of relationship we should desire, media frequently presents an unhealthy image. Films and television captivate us, and not unreasonably so. However, in these programs and movies we are offered ideas of physical appearances and personal relationships that are commonly unhealthy.

As Church we are blessed with a loving, comprehensive view of each individual and interpersonal relationships. Accordingly, it becomes our responsibility to offer this vision in a welcoming, warm, and manner appropriate for young adults.

Some suggestions:

- ♦ If media is the mechanism for the negative image, use the same media for the positive images we offer. Utilize the excellent blogs, web rings, and websites that are already in place. Highlight websites you believe to be particularly suited to your young adult community. CCC 905

- ◆ Vignette videos, video casting, is an excellent way to spread the vision. Youtube.com and Godtube.com are two incredibly popular websites that offer a free source to publish your videos with your message to literally millions of people. In addition you can put these videos on your website, blogs, Face book, MySpace, and other web based sources of outreach and evangelization.
- ◆ The importance and power of Internet based ministry cannot be underestimated with young adults. Make full use of these forums as they are inexpensive (often free) and literally where the young adults are.
- ◆ While virtual responses are immensely helpful, it is important for the Church to offer face-to-face opportunities to look at the positive vision for personal and interpersonal relationships. Personal sharing and testimony provide powerful mechanisms for people to work through the negative images and predispositions media promotes.
- ◆ movie nights where male and female roles in movies are analyzed are helpful. Looking at films that fall on the negative side can be just as valuable as those that exemplify healthy images and relationships. Including a discussion on Christian morality will help round out such a group.
- ◆ *Young Adult Works*, published by Center for Ministry Development offers several pertinent discussion guides for young adults.
- ◆ Renew's Theology on Tap is a mechanism and resource for dealing with identity issues for both genders.
- ◆ Create your own media campaign that portrays the following in an appealing and relevant manner:
 - The why – why is it wrong?
 - Statistics on pornography – the incidence of pornography, the effects of pornography, and so forth.
 - Publish via traditional and digital means ‘sound bytes’ of information such as where to go for help, programs offered.

Individualism and Morality in Today's Society CCC 1910

The picture presented in our media and the unexamined acquiescence contributes to our society's concept of ethics within the private and public spheres. The general trend in American society is to trumpet the individual while embracing a relativistic view of society. This nearly idolization of the individual stands in stark contrast to the Church's belief in community and the common good. Similarly, the indefatigable truths we as Church hold to come to dispute the inclination to accept relativism.

As society journeys in its pursuit of individualism, a sense of community, mutual dependency, mutual responsibility, come to be forgotten. We forget that we are not islands in the sea of society. It becomes our responsibility to offer the much more hopeful and healthy vision of society and morality through a redirection from individual to communal.

Some suggestions:

- ◆ Offer formation activities, groups, and discussions that focus on what it means to be a healthy human in an individual and a communal setting.

- ◆ Offer opportunities to understand the interconnectivity of all humans. Whether it is a film, like *It's a Wonderful Life*, or other resource, there are many options.
- ◆ Service learning and social justice topics inherently draw the individual into a greater, healthier view of society.
- ◆ Look at where young adults already have community – Facebook, MySpace, blogs, discussion boards, etc. – use these as stepping stones.
- ◆ Create opportunities to examine, reflect and share thoughts on scripture such as 1 Corinthians 12, Sirach 6, Romans 12, John 15:1-15, Acts 2:42-47, Acts 4:32-35
- ◆ Create situations where activities help to express the idea of the significance of community and the role of individuals in that community. An activity like the Body of Life:
 - Four people per group with each person given a part of the body (eyes, hands, feet, mouth).
 - Give 3 to 4 activities for the group to accomplish followed by reflection questions.
 - Reflect on how each part of the body is dependent on another. It is succeed together or suffer together.
 - Vital scripture: 1 Corinthians 12 followed by 1 Corinthians 13.

Society: Online v. In Real Life CCC 2354

Today there is a global society forming that anyone with computer and Internet access can join. The number of people able to join this virtual community grows daily. Relationships between individuals and groups form and dissolve defying the confines of distance and time. As never before we are offered the chance to see the bonds that tie us together as a universal people. The technological wonder of virtual relationships that exist outside of real life interaction bring some difficulties that contribute to the problem of pornography.

While these relationships can have value, they can, and often do lack many aspects of true, healthy, relationships found in real life. It becomes imperative as a Church to encourage depth, not breath in interpersonal relationships. A balance between encouraging sacramental relationships must be found while not falling prey to the temptation of scrupulosity.

Some Suggestions:

- ◆ Promote the positive attributes of online and virtual communication:
 - Create a “Top 10” list of blogs or websites. Ask those who use the medium to see its value first. Then follow up with ten things of value you cannot get online that you need to be in person.
 - As young adults form communities so easily online, offer information on real life communities in readily accessible sites. Information such as links, calendars, etc. to help them make real life connections. Do not assume that everyone knows where to look for this information.

Business to Business CCC 2354 CCC 2094

Before leaving the societal patterns that enable the spread and addiction of pornography, it is crucial to observe that this is a business we face. It is no less formidable, though it may be more covert, than any other big business in today's society. With advertising specialists, commercial experience, product quality concerns, and a commitment to creating profit, they have a drive to see their product accepted on a broad scale by as broad of an audience as possible.

We, as Church, need to learn from this industriousness. Persistence and product quality must guide our actions and materials we use in our ministry. We must bring to light that this is an industry concerned not with the welfare of individuals used to create its product nor the consumers who purchase it. Their motives must be exposed and people encouraged to reflect on what it means to cooperate with them.

Another key component of this is the slippery slope that pornography operates with on a regular basis. There are many publications, films, and television programs that are the beginning of that slope. We may, and rightfully so, say the particular show or publication is fine. There might be some discomfort or displeasure, but it has not crossed the threshold into unacceptable or pornographic. However, that threshold is not so much a bright line, but a quick slide down a slippery slope. Sneak attacks literally pop up on the Internet. A mistyped web address leads to an undesirable site. Accordingly, we need to fortify a strong sense of resourcefulness in dealing with the unexpected, an ability to set aside temptation due to fortitude, and to recognize when something is unacceptable.

Some Suggestions:

- ◆ Discuss ramifications of pornography stemming from a 'big business.' Look at the moral and ethical issues involved and allow for reflect to follow.
- ◆ OSV pamphlet regarding pornography.
- ◆ Video, Power and Impact of the media.
- ◆ Promote discussions of dwelling and seeing.
- ◆ Help with teaching tools to empower individuals to deal with the unexpected.
- ◆ Establish sneak attacks in response – utilize web options to create gateways to positive teachings, activities and reflections.

PART TWO: PERSONAL OR INDIVIDUAL

Self-Identity CCC 2540

As discussed before, we are faced with many voices and images telling us who and what we should be. Not all are negative. However, there are many negative messages that the media puts in front of us. When it comes to relationships, a distortion appears showing that the goal of relationships is nothing more than intimidation, conquest, or possession of a trophy.

Accordingly, we need to allow for discussion and formation of healthy relationships in an environment that allows for people to come "as they are" not as the world would have them.

Creating opportunities for couples to model healthy relationships are essential. Additionally, the broader development of a healthy communal person will aid in this area.

Moreover, the media portrays a sense of empowerment when sexuality is used to manipulate the behavior of others. Sexuality becomes nothing more than a tool with which to barter for power. Women will contribute to the problem by using their sexuality and bodies as currency to gain power or influence over others. Whether it is their significant other or a stranger on the street, this bartering cheapens the gift of sexuality and erodes a healthy self-identity.

Some Suggestions:

- ◆ Offer retreats that focus on health relationships comprised of individuals with healthy self-identities.
 - Refresh Retreat offered through the Diocese of Lansing.
 - “Celebrate You, Celebrate Me.” St. Mary’s Press, *Vine and Branches I*.
 - Ensure a balance is kept between flexibility and structure as these topics inherently lead to reflection and discussion.
 - Provide opportunities to reflect on how healthy friendships and families form us as mates.
- ◆ Provide social events that allow individuals to come “as they are.”
 - Picnic & Concert offered by Diocese of Lansing.
 - Look to other parishes with active young adult ministries. See the Diocesan website for links.
 - Consider options like a coffee house or drop-in center atmosphere that would allow for healthy relationships to form in a casual setting.
 - The Ark, St. Mary’s Westphalia
- ◆ Ensure that leaders and volunteers are well trained in hospitality. Through discussion starters, icebreakers, and activities like board games, the first difficult steps to forming sound relationships are begun.
- ◆ Offer formation opportunities in communication skills such as listening to aid in the development of healthy communal people.
- ◆ The writings of the saints and scripture offer many opportunities to reflect and discuss relevant issues. Consider posting such writings on a website. Include reflections of saints that struggled with identity and power issues.
- ◆ Incorporate self-esteem and self-identity into various components of your ministry:
 - Retreats that allow for sustained discussions, reflections, and community building.
 - Johari window activity: The self that I see that others see, the self I see that others do not see, the self other see that I see, the self other see that I don’t see. It is a small group process with reflection.
- ◆ *Leadership for Life*, young adult leadership training resources from Center for Ministry Development incorporates many of these skills.
- ◆ Empower people according to their gifts and talents. CCC 2552
The following may help:
 - *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey.
 - Reflection on Romans 7 (in our weakness, grace gives us hope)
 - Exercises that focus on our gifts and talents, skills survey

- Activities that emphasize cooperation and use of each gift to succeed (ropes courses, group exercises).
- Reflection on 1 Corinthians 12. All are gifted, but each needs the other
- Scriptural reflection on meaning of Genesis 1:26-27; male and female, made in God's image.
- ◆ Offer positive female role models:
 - Lives of the saints.
 - Movie nights discussing stories with positive women in the leading roles. Discussion groups to follow. Examples might be *Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story* or *Flight Plan*.
 - Look at groups like Feminists for Life that incorporate a strong, positive sense of femininity with faith and activism. These groups may provide a resource for you with speakers, mentors, and materials.
 - *Woman* by Edith Stein.
- ◆ Affirm vocation and calling of individuals.
 - Offer opportunities to form a holistic understanding of vocations including and understanding of the many paths a vocation may lead you down.
 - Panel discussions where people from various vocations offer insight may be helpful.
- ◆ A mentoring program where older adult women meet with young adult women to share stories and how to respond in various situations and relationships.

Modesty CCC 2524

Modesty is often seen as an issue to address solely with adolescent age girls. However, the virtue of modesty is one that is applicable to both men and women at all stages of life. Again, this issue will take combating much of what society puts in front of us each day. It also becomes a personal issue in that people wish to appear attractive and confident. Accordingly, it becomes necessary to help individuals see that modesty does not mean becoming unattractive or losing any self-identity. Rather it means self-respect and seeking means to be attractive in a way that also respects others.

Some suggestions:

- ◆ For women, consider offering discussions or activities that link fashion and merchandising to the practicalities of women wanting to be fashionable, attractive, age-appropriate, and modest. This is challenging for young women in their 20s and 30s given mainstream fashion and merchandizing.
- ◆ Consider an opportunity to facilitate discussions between young adult men and women on this issue. Separate the groups according to gender. Ask each group independently to describe the perfect person to date. Come to some agreement. Then come together to discuss. Look at issues such as what do the differences indicate, where are they similar. Other questions can be used to uncover thoughts and feelings on topics awkward to discuss together.

- ◆ With the runways of Paris, Milan, and New York often showing fashions not only expensive but frequently immodest, offer an alternative fashion show. Ensure that the fashions are indeed fashionable and in a reasonable price range for your young adults.
- ◆ Offer opportunities to reflect, discuss, and act upon the idea that modesty is a cultural context and the question is asked, “What do I communicate by the way I dress?”

Need for Human Contact CCC 2182

All humans crave human contact. Frequently pornography serves as a surrogate when there is an absence. There are times when the contact is lost due to unhealthy relationship patterns, nervousness in social situations, simply moving to a new locality, or a host of other situations may arise that isolate an individual. At these times the Church, with its ministry of hospitality, message of love, and focus on the communal becomes essential.

Some suggestions:

- ◆ As stated in many sections above, ensure that there are opportunities for young adults to gather in casual, comfortable situations.
- ◆ Encourage an outreach of young adults to other young adults. A particular focus might be on new coworkers, neighbors, etc who may not have a strong network in place.
- ◆ Like just about anything else, the inherent need for human contact can be corrupted. Allow opportunities to reflect and discuss on positive forms of human contact.
 - One area might be to look at *Theology of the Body*. CCC 364
- ◆ *Theology on Tap* provides an excellent way to reach out to people and begin to form healthy, hopeful relationships.

As An Addiction CCC 1866

In all of the discussion thus far, the fact that casual use of pornography may lead to an addiction has been mentioned or implied. However, we cannot lose sight of the reality that when it develops into an addiction it becomes necessary to treat it as we would any addiction to a drug or alcohol. Such treatment requires both a medical, psychological, and pastoral approach.

Some Suggestions:

- ◆ Look to resources on dealing with other addictions for models:
 - The 12 Step Resources
 - You may wish to make adjusting the 12 Steps a project in your ministry that includes the young adult community.
 - Collect and make readily available in many formats (print, audio, digital) resources on ‘getting back on the bandwagon.’
 - Offer opportunities for professional help. Consider having a list of counselors or therapists that deal with addictions from a Christian perspective available at your parish.
- ◆ Celebrate the mercy and healing of God
 - Especially following discussions and events where the problem of pornography is discussed, offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

- Provide reflections and/or discussions on scriptures that reflect on the power of prayer and call us to conversion: 2 Corinthians 5:12-17, Philippians 4:4-7, John 15:1-8.
- ◆ Address the issue that many times one addiction indicates others may be at work too. CCC 1673
 - Through counseling, resources, or other venues discuss the concept of a ‘gateway,’ how to avoid or block entry points (knowing your triggers).
 - Assist in providing alternatives for individuals’ time.
 - Look to Luke 11: 24-26.
- ◆ Look to the inter- and intrapersonal issues at play with an addiction.
 - Regarding interpersonal issues:
 - Offer opportunities to develop communication and listening skills.
 - Possibly reflections on books such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, or *Wild at Heart* by John Aldridge may assist.
 - In addition to having counselors available or information on therapists, list those that will work with couples.
 - Encourage honesty and communication about the needs and concerns of each other in a relationship.
 - Regarding intrapersonal issues:
 - Again, the importance of professional therapy in dealing with addictions.
 - A spiritual director may assist with the ongoing conversion.
 - Offer reflections and discussions on characteristics of a healthy relational person: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Galatians 5:22-25.
- ◆ It is impossible to overstate the significance of positive private help in dealing with an addiction to pornography. As many people will be afraid to admit to their problems in this area, it is key to offer simple ways for them to connect to the assistance they need.
 - Look at vehicles to deliver the information that remain anonymous – websites, bulletins.
 - Frequently, greater honesty may come from separating the men and women for discussion purposes. However, it is important for each group to understand what affects the other group sexually.

Trust is a key component to any steps you may take. Establishing a trust filled relationship with the people you are ministering to and with will aid you in your efficacy. CCC 2797
 - Determine ways you can fit the discussion of the problem of pornography into other more general activities. This will establish a sense of openness, trust, and offer chances to create formational opportunities.
 - Offer trust building activities and have several resources available. Provide scriptural reflections and connect to our trust to God. An example may be Jesus walking on the water and Peter’s experience in trying to follow.

CONCLUSION

The spectrum of problems that accompany the prevalence of pornography in today’s society are, as we have seen, quite diverse. At all times we must keep in sight and as a guiding principle that

we are dealing with individuals. They in turn deserve love, respect, and compassion as we journey with them.

YOUNG ADULT RESOURCES FOR FAITH & LIFE

Busted Halo.com is a website for young adults with podcast, blogs, reflections and resources.
<http://www.bustedhalo.com/index2.html>

Googling God: The Religious Landscape of people in their 20's and 30's by Mike Hayes
An insightful book helping us to understand the spiritual and communal needs for people in their 20's and 30's

Young Adult Works from the Center for Ministry Development provides catechetical session, prayer, guides for young adult gatherings and retreats that are relevant to young adults and the life issues they face.

Sharing God's Word Through the Year provides small group young adult relevant reflections on the Sunday readings. The three volumes correlate with the three cycles of readings.

To Encounter Christ (TEC) is a wonderful retreat opportunity for young adults in the early 20's that helps them to examine their life journey in light of the many changes they experience and in light of Christ' journey. TEC is facilitated by a community of former TEC participants and ministry leaders.

Refresh is a young adult retreat for singles who are looking for direction in their lives in light of the many choices they face. Refresh is facilitated primarily by young adults who have had the Refresh experience.

Diocese of Lansing website includes a site for young adult ministry with events designed especially for young adults and links to young adult groups and ministries throughout the diocese.

<http://www.dioceseoflansing.org/youngadult/index.html>

True Love: God's Plan for Abstinence Until Marriage This video series with discussion guide is published by Media Pro and includes Questions from "Pure Love" by Jason Evert. Young adult witness and honest sharing of their own mistakes and struggles make this series a good take off point for small group discussion for youth or young adults.

The Right Choice This video portrays a story that will touch hearts and waken us to the true humanity of unborn life. Produced by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, it is written by Patt Shea and directed by Jack Shea.

Connections 2008: A Directory of Volunteer Opportunities is provided by the St. Vincent Pallotte Center and includes multiple opportunities for young adults to experience sharing their gifts for the benefit of others. Experiences such as these helps participants to learn through real life what charitable love truly is.

Response 2008: a directory of full-time faith based opportunities provided by Catholic Network of Volunteer Service. Like *Connections 2008* these opportunities provide life lessons of love and service then can truly change all who participate.

Helping Teens Unmask Sexual Con Games is published Boystown Press. The material is designed for classroom discussion with high school youth but the material is relevant for young adults and can be used for small group discussion with them.

Jesse Romero's page provides reflections for young adults on a variety of life issues.
<http://www.jesseromero.com/berealmen.htm>

Our Sunday Visitor Pamphlet
What the Church Teaches:
<http://catalog.osv.com/Catalog.aspx?ProductCode=P393>

Connecting Young Adults with the Word from Center for Ministry Development comes in three volumes for the three yearly cycles of Sunday readings. It provides homily tips relevant to young adults.

Leadership For Life: Discovering Your Gifts for Christian Leadership is published by Center For Ministry Development. This training manual for young adult leaders helps young adults recognize their gifts and develop their skills for ministry leadership.