

# ***Digital Character: How Can Parents and Schools Respond to the Challenge of Internet Pornography?***

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# **Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Rs**

## **(Respect and Responsibility)**

State University of New York at Cortland

**A similar PPT and the paper, “Battling Pornography: The Power of Media Literacy and Character Development,” are available on**

- **[www.cortland.edu/character](http://www.cortland.edu/character)**
- ***See also our excellence & ethics Winter 2016 issue: How to Teach Critical Thinking***



# The focus of this talk:

1. Why is pornography a problem we should be concerned about?
2. How can teachers and parents use character education—including media literacy and digital safety—to combat it?

# ***Smart & Good High Schools***

- Our 2-year study of 24 award-winning U.S. high schools
- Describes more than 100 best practices for developing 8 strengths of character

May be downloaded from:

[www.cortland.edu/character](http://www.cortland.edu/character)

# 8 Strengths of Character needed for a flourishing life

## *Being a . . .*

1. Lifelong learner and **critical thinker\***
2. Diligent and capable performer
3. Socially and emotionally skilled person
4. **Ethical thinker\***
5. **Respectful and responsible moral agent\***
6. **Self-disciplined person pursuing a healthy lifestyle\***
7. Contributing community member and democratic citizen
8. **Spiritual person crafting a life of noble purpose.\***


*\* Esp. relevant to avoiding and combatting pornography*



# “Educating for Character in the Sexual Domain”

*Peabody Journal of Education*, 2013, Vol. 88


([www.cortland.edu/character](http://www.cortland.edu/character))



Jubilee Centre annual conference on  
character education, Oxford University,  
January 2016

Thomas Lickona, “The Personal and  
Societal Consequences of the Sexual  
Revolution: The Elephant in Character  
Education’s Living Room”

(download from “conference papers,”  
[www.jubileecentre.ac.uk](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk))


- 
- The sexual revolution of the past half-century is arguably the dominant cultural revolution of modern times.
  - While it fostered more open communication about sex, it has created a sexual culture that is in many ways harmful to children's academic, social-emotional, sexual, and character development.





## ***The sexual revolution's problematic consequences for youth:***

1. The sexualizing of children by a hypersexualized media (including pornography) and marketplace
2. Increased sexual activity among youth
3. unwed pregnancies and births
4. abortions
5. sexually transmitted diseases
6. fatherless families (a leading predictor of youth problems)
7. children raised in unstable cohabiting households
8. children growing up in poverty.

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- *The sexual revolution normalized pornography.*  
Initially, magazines like *Playboy* popularized the idea that recreational sex and masturbating with pornography were healthy activities for men. In the U.S., by 1972, *Playboy* was reaching an estimated half of all male professionals.
  - Aided by the Internet, pornography has become ubiquitous and increasingly a part of the world of children and teens. The Internet made porn accessible and affordable (much of it free) and the use of it anonymous.

# 1. Lifelong learner and critical thinker

- Approaches learning as a lifelong process
- Examines evidence
- Shows skills of critical analysis, including media literacy
- Considers multiple perspectives
- Integrates knowledge
- Generates alternative solutions
- Has intellectual humility





# Media Literacy's 2 Goals:

*Help students learn to . . .*

1. think critically about various forms of media and their messages.
2. think critically about and improve their own media habits.



## ***Thinking Critically about Pornography***

1. How does pornography affect our respect for the dignity of other people?
2. Who are pornography's victims?
3. How does it affect our self-respect?
4. Why is it such big business?
5. What are gender differences in use of and attitudes toward pornography?
6. What rules should parents have about pornography?



# **What are the effects of exposure to and use of pornography?**

An important part of media literacy is sharing with our students the research on this question, including the testimonies of individuals who have experienced and overcome a pornography addiction.

# **“The Impact of Pornography on Children”**

**October 2015, [www.acped.org/](http://www.acped.org/)**


- A comprehensive research review.
- It defined pornography as “the depiction of erotic behavior (sexual display in pictures or writing) that is intended to cause sexual excitement in the viewer.”





*From “The Impact of Pornography”:*


- “Children are sometimes exposed to pornography accidentally on the Internet or through a parent’s or other adult’s pornographic material.”
- “Sexual predators have purposefully exposed young children to pornography for the purpose of grooming them for sexual exploitation.”



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- Pornography exposure often causes anxiety in children. Children also report feelings of disgust, shock, embarrassment, anger, fear, and sadness after viewing pornography.
  - Some children act out adult sexual acts they have seen in pornography.
  - Children under 12 who have viewed pornography are statistically more likely to sexually assault their peers.


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- By 2000, U.S. youth under 17 were spending 65% more time on adult pornography Internet sites than they did on game sites.
  - Four of the 10 youth who visited a pornographic site were girls.
  - In a 2010 survey of English children, a third said their first exposure to Internet pornography was at age 10 or younger.

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- Experts estimate that the *average* age at which boys in the US and UK begin using Internet pornography is now 11.5.



Zillman/Bryant studies (*Journal of Family Issues*, Dec., 1988; before the Internet)

- Subjects were college students and non-college students, randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups.
- The experimental group viewed pornographic material for 6 weeks; control group viewed non-sexual TV and movies.
- Subjects completed a survey designed to assess attitudes on relationship issues.



*Compared to the control group, subjects exposed to pornography (note: the deliberate exposure of subjects to a potentially harmful experience is ethically problematic):*

1. Demonstrated increased callousness toward women.
2. Considered the crime of rape less serious.
3. Were more accepting of non-marital sex.
4. Became more interested in more extreme and deviant forms of pornography.



5. Were more accepting of sexual infidelity in a relationship.

6. Valued marriage less.

7. Male subjects expressed a decreased desire for children.

8. Female subjects expressed a decreased desire to have a daughter.



Michael Flood, “The Harms of Pornography Exposure Among Children and Young People,” *Child Abuse Review*, 2009, 18.

*Finding:*

Males who consume pornography are more likely to adopt rape myth ideology—the belief that women cause rape or actually enjoy sexual assault.



## *JAMA Psychiatry* , May 2014:

- Pornography use is linked to lower functional connectivity to the prefrontal cortex.
- Even moderate pornography consumption is associated with reduced sexual responsiveness to real persons and smaller grey matter volume.
- These neural changes are similar to those seen in brains of persons addicted to cocaine and methamphetamines.





“The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research,”  
*Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 19, 2012.

- Examined studies conducted between 2005 and 2012 in diverse parts of the world, including China, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States.



Findings consistent across cultures:

*The more teens view pornography, the more they:*

- think about sex and become distracted by their thoughts about sex.
- approve of casual sex and start having sex in their early teens
- view women as sex objects
- engage in higher-risk sexual behaviors (multiple partners, anal sex, sex while using drugs)
- become more aggressive in their own sexual behavior (if the pornography is violent).



(cont.)

The more teens view pornography, the more they:

- become depressed
- engage in delinquent behavior
- have trouble developing close relationships with their parents and other caregivers.

**Conclusion:**

“The negative impact of Internet pornography on adolescent behavior—including compulsive, addictive, and even criminal behavior—appears to be a global trend.”



## Books on Understanding and Combatting Pornography

*Pornified: How Pornography is  
Transforming Our Lives, Our  
Relationships, and Our Families (2005)*

by Pamela Paul (a secular journalist  
who writes for *The New York Times*)




*Good Pictures/Bad Pictures: Porn-  
Proofing Today's Young Kids*

by Kristen A. Jensen & Gail Poyner, Ph.D.

*What's the Big Deal about Pornography?  
A Guide for the Internet Generation*

by Jill Manning, Ph.D.



*Every Man's Battle, Every Young Man's  
Battle, and Preparing Your Son for  
Every Man's Battle*

by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker



*Integrity Restored: Helping Catholic  
Families Win the Battle Against  
Pornography*

by Peter C. Kleponis

# People Going Public about Their Past Addiction to Pornography

“Since I was a teenager, it had been a rollercoaster ride of shame and justification. I am now 2 ½ years porn free, and it feels AMAZING. Not until I realized the implications this had on my marriage and my ability to father could I finally break free.”

—Nick Willis, New Zealand champion long-distance runner and winner of Olympic silver medal





# A Growing Anti-Porn Movement Led by Young People

*Time* magazine cover story, April 11, 2016:

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**PORN**

**Why Young Men Who Grew Up on It Are  
Becoming Advocates for Turning It Off**



**The *Time* article, “Porn and the Threat to Virility” by Belinda Luscombe, reported:**

Countless young men who have consumed lots of porn find themselves unable to have sex with real human beings. Only Internet pornography arouses them sexually.



“Porn and the Curse of Total Sexual Freedom” by Bishop Robert Barron  
(commentary on the *Time* article)

“Pornography is first and foremost an ethical violation, a deep distortion of human sexuality, an unconscionable objectification of persons who should never be treated as anything less than persons.”

—*Word on Fire* [www.catholicismwordonfire.org](http://www.catholicismwordonfire.org),  
reprinted in CERC (Catholic Educators Resource Center, [www.catholiceducation.org](http://www.catholiceducation.org))

# What's Wrong with Porn?

1. It violates the dignity of the human person by treating people as sex objects.
2. It violates the purpose of sex (love and life).
3. It's addictive—it brings short-term pleasure but then starts to run your life.
4. For boys, it's usually accompanied by masturbation, another habit that's hard to break.
5. Both habits will reduce your self-control and self-respect.
6. Both can cause problems in marriage.



**T. J. Morrow,**  
***Achieving Chastity in a  
Pornographic World***



# **Fight the New Drug**

([www.fightthenewdrug.org](http://www.fightthenewdrug.org))

## **Porn Kills Love**

([www.pornkillslove.com](http://www.pornkillslove.com))

- Started by college students in 2008
- Now a growing global movement



# Fight the New Drug's “Get the Facts” tab

**“Porn harms the brain, the heart,  
and the world.”**

## ***How does it harm the heart?***

“Research has found that after men are exposed to pornography, they rate themselves as less in love with their partner. They are more critical of their partner’s appearance and sexual performance. Divorces related to porn use have significantly increased.”




# How does porn affect the brain?

## **“The Science Behind Pornography”** ***In MercatorNet (July 22, 2016)***

by Kevin Majeres, M.D., a psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School who is teaching psychiatrists-in-training how to use virtue-based, cognitive-behavior therapy to treat pornography and other addictions



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- What makes Fight the New Drug effective character education?

- It's designed to develop the 3 essential components of character:

**THE HEAD, THE HEART,  
AND THE HAND.**

# BIG IDEA


*Any virtue, and character as a whole, has 3 parts:*

- Habits of the mind
- Habits of the heart
- Habits of behavior

# Good Character is:

- knowing the good
- desiring the good
- doing the good.

*Head, heart, and hand.*

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- Fight the New Drug develops the “head part” of character by teaching the facts about pornography.
  - It develops the “heart part” of character by making a porn-free life *attractive*, a path to freedom and love. It also presents pornography as a social justice issue as well as a public health problem—and appeals to every young person’s desire to make a difference.
  - It develops the “hand part” of character by providing tools for taking positive action.



# **Porn as a Social Justice Issue**

Much of today's pornography shows women being abused by one or more men. Women are forced to endure in rape scenes, verbal humiliation, group sex, bondage, and other degrading acts. Porn actors who have quit the industry say they were constantly threatened by agents and directors to force them into doing things they didn't want to do.



## ***Fight the New Drug's Ways to Make a Difference:***

- 1. Bring us to you.**
- 2. Spread the word**—download and share the “Get the Facts” research page.
- 3. Download the Fortify App.** If you’ve found yourself wanting to quit porn but haven’t been able to kick the habit, our app’s Battle Tracker and behavior analytics will help you monitor your progress and avoid triggers.

# What Can Parents Do?

1. Have early and ongoing conversations about sex and your family's beliefs and values.
2. Discuss the sexual messages in the media.
3. Visit [fightthenewdrug.org](http://fightthenewdrug.org) to get the facts about how pornography harms the brain, the heart, and society.
4. Read *Good Pictures/Bad Pictures* together.
5. Establish clear rules about viewing pornography and other sexual imagery; develop your children's conscience.



# My Can Do Plan

1. *Close my eyes immediately.*
2. *Always tell a trusted adult.*
3. *Name it when I see it.*
4. *Distract myself.*
5. *Order my thinking brain to be the boss.*



# The Main Message about Media

Explain to your kids: “Your use of media in the family is a privilege, not a right. That privilege has to be exercised with parental permission—and in a way that is consistent with our family values. So, for any particular TV show, movie, magazine, CD, video game, Internet site, social media, here’s the standard:

*Is it consistent with what we value and believe as a family?”*



# When Media Takes Over the Family

The problem with TV, video games, etc. can be:

1. Not only what they *promote* (bad role models and negative messages) but also . . .  
.
2. What they *prevent* (the face-to-face parent-child conversation through which values are transmitted and character is formed).



# Explain Why You Set Limits

“We want you to be able to watch good TV programs and movies and to use other media. But what you take into your mind can stay there for a very long time and affect you in ways you may not even be aware of. Parents who care about their kids set limits on these things. It’s because we love you.”



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**HOW TO USE GOOD MOVIES TO  
DEVELOP the  
HEAD, HEART, AND HAND**


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- An effective approach to combatting pornography has to *combine* media literacy (critical thinking) with broad character education that develops other-oriented virtues such as altruism (doing good without asking, “What’s in it for me?”)
  - Pornography is self-centered. Altruism focuses on others.



# A Curriculum for Teaching Altruism

(Dr. Paul Vitz, The Institute for the Psychological Sciences, [ips.org](http://ips.org))

1. Abridged (half-hour) versions of 7 inspiring films were shown to New York City 13-year-olds in schools in tough neighborhoods where drugs and crime were common.
2. Classes met once a week for 7 weeks. After viewing a film, students discussed:
  - Who in the movie performed an altruistic act?
  - What made it altruistic?
  - How did it affect others?




- Discussions used analogies (like a rock creating ripples in a pond) to help students understand the potential of an altruistic act to affect many people. The goal of discussion was to develop a deep understanding of altruism (the head) and an attraction to this virtue (the heart).

- **The daily homework (the hand):**

“Every day for the next 6 weeks, carry out an altruistic act of your own choosing—at school, at home, in your neighborhood . . .”





Each student received a journal with a separate page for recording each altruistic act, including:

- What was done
- Why it was done
- How the person(s) helped responded.



## *Sample entries from students' journals:*

- I gave an old lady my seat on the bus.
- I helped a friend study for a test.
- I shoveled the snow on my neighbor's sidewalk.
- I tutored a 6<sup>th</sup>-grader in math.
- I picked up litter in the schoolyard.
- I gave some of my old clothes to the poor.
- I did the dishes for my brother (it was his turn.)

## *Results of the experiment:*

- Students' pro-altruistic attitudes increased (measured by their response to Qs such as, "How many hours a week are you willing to donate to help people in this community?")
- Parents reported that students continued to perform altruistic acts at home and school with greater frequency than before.

## *Results (cont.):*

- Asked to write an essay on “Why is the virtue of altruism important to you?”, *two-thirds* of the students said that being altruistic made them feel better about themselves.
- Doing altruistic acts appeared to affect their *sense of identity*—their sense of the kind of person they were.

For example, one boy wrote: “*I know I’m a good person because I do good things.*”



*“Evaluating a Short Curriculum for Teaching Altruism” is available from:*

Dr. Paul Vitz, The Institute for the Psychological Sciences, Suite 511, 2001 Jefferson Davis Highway, Arlington, VA 22202.

## *Other movie resources:*

Screenit.com and Kidsinmind.com (parental guidance)

- *Love and Life at the Movies*, developed by Dr. Onalee McGraw of the Educational Guidance Institute (<http://educationalguidanceinstitute.com/>), is a character education curriculum whose films contain no bad language, violence, or sexual references. They depict virtues such as integrity, courage, and love and show the meaning of moral and social bonds within the larger community.
- *Teach With Movies* ([www.TeachWithMovies.com](http://www.TeachWithMovies.com)) catalogues hundreds of films and offers lesson plans for using movies to explore character themes.