

Dear Parents

Pornography has probably been around since men first learnt to draw with bits of charcoal. The medium has changed but men remain pretty constant (on average).

I have no recollection of any pornography at junior school (I wonder how many grade 8 boys can say that!). However, when I was fourteen I remember we had a pack of tiny playing cards in our dormitory, each of which had a topless woman on it. Card games became popular and people played honestly being far more interested in the picture on the back than whether you had the ace of spades or not! Over the years ahead boys brought back various magazines that they had acquired from brothers etc and these did the rounds, with the odd boy being caught and beaten six (not too hard, as I think the housemaster was pretty pleased with his new acquisition). We did not see any nakedness on film because the film crew were under strict instructions to put their hands over the projector lens whenever it appeared (boys were always keen to join the crew!). I only ever remember them “forgetting” once. It was *Pat Garrett and Billy the kid* - and the fact that I remember shows you how exciting it was for us all! There was no way for us to watch “blue” movies, even if we could have got them. The first I ever saw was in the lounge in my commando. I remember nothing at all about it except that at the end most of the young troopers did not want to stand up for a while, which the older soldiers found very amusing (with hindsight I think they set us up)!

For the next 20-odd years I did not really come across pornography. I remember as an assistant housemaster in School House about 10 years ago when helping the new grade 8 boys into their dormitory with some nervous Mums and Dads, we moved a locker and three magazines appeared – much to the amusement of some and horror of others. It almost seems quaint now when compared with what the intervening ten years have brought into the lives of our sons. In the five years I spent as a Housemaster the volume of pornography around increased markedly as the technological revolution happened and almost every boy owned a laptop and then an ipod and cellphone with video capacity. In addition, because people get bored with the same thing, the variety of what appeared grew. I remember a few years back an American author asking, “How many people will our children have watched being killed in movies and other TV programs by the time they leave school?”. One could ask now, “How many people have our children watched having sex by the time they reach the end of their schooling?”. I am afraid that in many cases it would be astonishing and much of it will include scenes with multiple partners – both straight and gay. On occasions as a Housemaster I confiscated pornography that was of such a volume that a boy could have sat for most of a day watching it and not got through it all. Like magazines of old this circulates through and between grades but with greater ease as it can be copied from disk to disk (of course, this is not only a boarding issue – it is a dayboy-issue too). Boys do not change – just the temptations they face.

So how do we as parents respond to this new challenge which faces our boys?

How dangerous it all is for them would seem to depend, in part, upon the nature of individual and the emotional space he is in. It is plain that some boys are more prone to

addiction to pornography than others. It may be hard for us to gauge our own son's response. However, like for drugs, I think wisdom dictates that we should be talking to our sons about the issue and not just leaving the whole thing to chance. It is important that our sons know what we expect of them and what we think about pornography – our moral position on it as well as our fears for them around it.

Some years ago Mr Bantjes, with input from the Housemasters' Committee, put together the school policy on pornography. If you have not read it, or have not read it for some time, then can I suggest that you follow the link below and read it through? You may even like to print it out and give it to your son. It may spark a discussion – it may not. I know it is not an easy topic for many of us to engage our sons in.

Sex can make fools of men and something which most adults find wonderfully special can cause such sadness, humiliation and regrets. We need to help our sons choose a wise path - encouraging them to exercise self-control and good judgement from a young age.

Yours sincerely

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