

**Battling Pornography:  
The Power of Media Literacy and Character Development**

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For more than four decades, my work as a developmental psychologist and educator has focused on helping schools and parents develop good character in youth. I direct a character education center at the State University of New York in Cortland, New York. Among many things, our Center’s work includes teaching young people how to respect the gift of their sexuality—how to exercise virtues such as good judgment, modesty, self-control, and authentic love in this vulnerable part of their lives. More than ever, our children need good guidance in this crucial area from their parents and teachers and others who love them.

The sexual revolution has been the dominant cultural revolution of the past half century. It promoted a radical ideology of unrestricted sexual freedom. It has created a more difficult world for our children to grow up in, a hypersexualized culture that surrounds them with sexual pressures and temptations and the message that in matters of sex, anything is okay “as long as nobody gets hurt.” Sex without commitment has dramatically increased the number of unwed births and greatly reduced a child’s chances of growing up with two parents in a stable and loving family. In my own country, the United States, more than 40 percent of children now go to sleep in a home where their father does not live.

In 2011, a team of 18 family scholars published the report, *Why Marriage Matters: Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences*.<sup>1</sup> Father absence and unstable cohabiting households have put children at greater risk of doing poorly in school, peer relationship problems, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, anxiety, depression, and suicide. These trends can be found in many societies around the world.

A 2016 book by the German sociologist, Gabriele Kuby, is provocatively titled, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*. In an interview with *MercatorNet*, an Australian online magazine, she was asked to explain why her book’s title speaks of the “destruction of freedom in the name of freedom.” She said:

Everybody knows from experience that the urges and drives of the body need to be controlled, be it sex or food or drink; otherwise they will control us. Therefore *temperance* is one of the cardinal virtues. Sexual norms have a decisive influence on the whole cultural edifice. The anthropologist J.D. Unwin, an Oxford scholar of the 1930s, showed in his book *Sex and Culture*, that high culture can only exist with strict sexual

norms. We are now in a cultural revolution that overthrows sexual morality. The severe consequences are obvious. As sex goes, so goes the family. As the family goes, so goes society.<sup>2</sup>

One of the biggest effects of the sexual revolution is that it normalized pornography. Initially, pornography magazines like *Playboy* popularized the idea that recreational sex and masturbating<sup>3</sup> with pornography were healthy activities for men.

With the arrival of the Internet, pornography exploded.

In 2005, the secular journalist Pamela Paul published *Pornified: How Pornography is Transforming Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families*<sup>4</sup> Almost overnight, pornography had taken the destabilizing consequences of the sexual revolution to a new and even more destructive level.

According to recent estimates, the average age at which boys now begin use of Internet pornography is 11. Many are addicted by the time they are teens. Many carry that addiction into their marriages and families.

But there is good news in the battle against pornography. Many smart and dedicated people are addressing the problem. As families and schools, we can draw hope from that and make use of their good work.

Let me read to you the titles of just some of the books, published in the past decade, that help us understand the problem of pornography and give us ways to fight it<sup>5</sup>:

- *Integrity Restored: Helping Catholic Families Win the Battle Against Pornography*, by the Catholic psychotherapist, Dr. Peter Kleponis (whose approach integrates Catholic spirituality).
- *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked our Sexuality*, by Gail Dines
- *The Drug of the New Millennium: The Science of How Internet Pornography Radically Alters the Human Brain and Body*, by Mark Castleman
- *Good Pictures/Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids*, by Kristen A. Jensen and Gail Poyner
- *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*, by William Struthers
- *Every Man's Battle, Every Young Man's Battle, and Preparing Your Son for Every Man's Battle*, by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker.

It's also good news that more people who have bravely battled and overcome a pornography addiction are going public with their stories. Here is one example: Nick Willis is

32 years old, a champion long-distance runner, and a national hero in New Zealand. He won a silver medal in the 1500 meters at the Beijing Olympics and raced in the Rio Olympics this past summer. Recently, he surprised his fans with a Facebook post about his past addiction to pornography.

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



It's good news that we have educational tools that schools and families can use in fighting this battle. Character education, especially character education that includes media literacy, is one such tool. Media literacy, whether it's done at home or in classrooms, has two goals:

1. to teach students how to think critically about all forms of media (Who created this? What are the messages?)
2. to teach students to think critically about their own media habits—about the different kinds of media they personally interact with, whether it's television, video games, their smart phones, or pornography. How does any particular form of media influence their values, beliefs, attitudes, goals, how they spend their time, and the kind of person they are becoming? Is it making them a better person and helping them build a positive future—or not?

This kind of self-examination turns media literacy into authentic character education. It challenges students to take a hard look in the mirror—and then change what they discover needs changing.

It's not hard to get students to think critically about media. They enjoy that. It's considerably harder to get them to think critically about themselves. But that's essential for building character—and for confronting the problem of pornography.

It's also very good news that there is now a science of pornography that helps us understand how pornography does its damage. It's good news that there is a growing body of solid scientific research showing the many harmful effects of pornography.

It's good news that more therapists and others in the mental health profession recognize pornography addiction as a problem. For many years they did not. You may be surprised to learn—I was—that Harvard University now has a Catholic psychiatrist on its Medical School faculty who is teaching psychiatrists-in-training how to use a *virtue-based approach* to treating pornography and other addictions.

It's also good news that there is a growing anti-pornography movement led by young people themselves.

You may have seen *Time* magazine's red and black cover last April, with "PORN" in huge letters, and the subtitle: "Why Young Men Who Grew Up on It Are Becoming Advocates for Turning It Off."<sup>6</sup> The article inside was titled, "Porn and the Threat to Virility." It reported that countless young men who have consumed lots of Internet pornography are finding themselves unable to have normal sexual activity with real human beings. They say that when they have the opportunity for sexual relations with their wives or girlfriends, they cannot perform. In many cases, they've lost all interest in real sex. Only Internet pornography arouses them sexually.

Some young men who have been affected in this way have begun to speak out about this problem in an effort to warn others. Some are setting up support groups to help guys who are hooked on porn.

After the *Time* article was published, the U.S. bishop Robert Barron wrote a thoughtful commentary titled, "Porn and The Curse of Total Sexual Freedom."<sup>7</sup> You may have seen Father Barron's highly praised, 10-part documentary, "Catholicism." He's a very smart guy and a gifted teacher. I recommend his critique of the *Time* story on porn as something you could have your students read, discuss, and write about in your efforts to develop their skills of moral reasoning.

In his essay, Bishop Barron said that it is a good thing that young men are trying to warn their peers about the effects of porn on one's ability to have sex with a real person. But something really important was missing from *Time* magazine's reporting on this problem. He wrote:

What really struck me in the *Time* article is that neither the author, nor anyone that she interviewed or referenced, ever spoke of pornography as something morally objectionable. It has apparently come to the culture's attention as a problem only because it has resulted in erectile dysfunction!

Suppose guys doing porn could take a Super Pill that would make them able to have sex with real women again? Would that make porn okay?

Here's a perfect opportunity to challenge and develop your students' ability to reason morally, to ask, "What makes something right or wrong?" If your students or children asked you that question, how would you answer it?

What makes stealing wrong? Adultery? Premarital sex? Abortion? Infanticide? Pornography? Masturbation? Human trafficking?

There are two ways we can evaluate the morality of an act and judge whether it is good or bad. We can look at the consequences of an act. Or we can look at the act itself, at whether it is wrong *in and of itself*—not just because of whatever negative consequences it might have.

Let's apply this to pornography. What's wrong with the act itself? Bishop Barron points out that 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."

Porn treats people as objects, to be used for the sexual pleasure of viewers and the profit of the pornographers. That's inherently wrong; persons have human dignity that must be respected; human beings must never be exploited. Sex is also meant to express and deepen love between people; porn sex has nothing to do with love.

The negative consequences of porn are obviously important to consider, but they are secondary. The sexual sickness of our society, Bishop Barron says, is a symptom of something deeper—our belief that sex can be divorced from love and that sexual pleasure can be pursued in any way we wish, including pornography. We won't cure the sickness unless we address the underlying cause.

Let me share a story that shows a practical application of this kind of moral reasoning to the problem of men struggling with pornography.

In his book *Achieving Chastity in a Pornographic World*, Father T. G. Morrow explains a counseling strategy he developed to help such men.<sup>8</sup> He illustrates this approach with the story of one young man he counseled:

He was praying a good deal each day and attending daily Mass. He had a reasonably balanced life and was happy in his job. But he was struggling with unchaste thoughts and desires. I explained to him the need to convert rather than suppress his sexual appetite, as recommended by Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Pope John Paul II. He was to present to his mind, repeatedly, the values he would gain by living chastely, things like "treating others as persons, not objects," "living by reason, not by his urges," and "upholding the sacredness of sex." I had him make a list of these reasons, and

encouraged him to read the list several times a day. He began to do this, and within a year, he told me he was over the struggle.<sup>9</sup>

Father Morrow says he has recommended this method to others who were trying to stop using pornography. A number of them have said that, after only a few months, it was helping them a great deal. He explains why he thinks this approach has been helpful:

According to Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle, chastity is the habitual moderation of the sexual appetite in accord with right reason. It is bringing the sexual appetite consistently under [the control of] reason. Notice it is not just the regulation of *behavior*, which would be self-control, but of the very *desires* that lead to sexual behavior. Note, too, that the norm is “right” reason, i.e., reason in conformity with God’s Eternal Law, not merely worldly reason.

The sexual appetite seems to have a life of its own, and it listens not only to reason but to the senses and the imagination as well. Thus, one must find a way to “convince” the sexual appetite to obey reason and not the senses or the imagination.

I’ve talked with men, some married, who said they found they couldn’t pray themselves out of a pornography addiction and had to seek the help of a 12-step program similar to Alcoholics Anonymous. Father Morrow’s experience, however, encourages us to experiment with different ways to tap deeply into the power of right reason in the hope that our intellect, used wisely, can govern our will and control even the strongest of desires.

### **Fight the New Drug**

It’s also good news that there’s another grassroots, anti-pornography movement that’s much broader in its approach than the one *Time* magazine wrote about. It’s dedicated to educating young people and the public at large about *all* the harms of pornography, not just the problem of erectile dysfunction. It also shows how the porn industry grossly violates and exploits people.

This movement is called Fight the New Drug ([www.fightthenewdrug.org](http://www.fightthenewdrug.org)). It was started in 2008 by college guys. They tell their story in a 3-minute video, “Fight the New Drug: A Movement for Love.” <http://fightthenewdrug.org/video-fight-the-new-drug-a-movement-for-love/>

You can also find that story in print. It’s in Fight the New Drug’s book, published last year, called *FORTIFY: The Fighter’s Guide to Overcoming Pornography Addiction*.<sup>10</sup>

In 2008, a group of college students started an entrepreneurial group on our campus called Entrepreneurs Dedicated to Great Endeavors (EDGE). While we were sharing our goals and aspirations, one member said he wanted to raise money to put up a billboard addressing the issue of pornography. That triggered a deep and lasting conversation about pornography. Many members of the group had seen its harmful effects in their

own lives and in the lives of their friends and family members. They wondered why so few people were talking about the issue openly.

These students decided to become experts on the topic. After they did their research, they were determined to educate others—particularly teenagers and young adults. From there, a movement was born called Fight the New Drug. At first, we weren't sure who would jump on board with such a taboo topic. But within one week of launching a simple website, more than 10,000 people had joined the cause. Since then, this movement has grown to influence millions of people all over the world.

The website includes a lot of other videos you could use as part of a media literacy unit or watch at home with your family. Here's another good one to start with: "The History of Porn and The New Anti-Porn Movement" (also 3 minutes). The link: <https://www.youtube.com/user/FightTheNewDrug>

Then check out the [Get the facts](#) tab. That link will take you to an excellent summary of how pornography "harms the brain, the heart, and the world." You can read and absorb the key points under each of those three headings in about 15 minutes.

### **The "Porn Kills Love" Movement**

Fight the New Drug has launched a second website, Porn Kills Love [www.pornkillslove.com](http://www.pornkillslove.com). Porn Kills Love has become its own movement, promoted by young women as well as guys. They emphasize that they are "pro-sex"—but sex in the right kind of relationship, one where there is true love and lasting commitment.

Here is what the website's [Get the facts](#) page says about "how porn kills love":

In real life, real love requires a real person. Research has found that after men are exposed to pornography, they rate themselves as less in love with their partner than men who didn't see any porn. After being exposed to pornographic images, people were more critical of their partner's appearance, sexual curiosity, sexual performance, and displays of affection. As a result of these effects, divorces related to porn use have increased significantly.

The website backs up each assertion of fact with research citations. Fight the New Drug says,

The most important aspect of our campaign is credible, peer-reviewed research. We're the first generation with a scientific, fact-based understanding of the harm pornography can do.

## What Do Other Sources of Evidence Say?

If you are doing a good job of teaching critical thinking when you do media literacy, your students might ask, “But how do we know Fight the New Drug isn’t biased? They have an agenda; they don’t want people to use porn. Why should we trust what they say about the research?”

Affirm your students for asking tough questions like these. A healthy skepticism is part of critical thinking. Have them look at other sources of evidence.

Here is one: In October 2015, the American College of Pediatricians ([www.acpeds.org/](http://www.acpeds.org/)) issued a report titled: “The Impact of Pornography on Children” (<https://www.acpeds.org/?s=The+Impact+of+Pornography>). It summarized dozens of studies of pornography’s effects on both children and adults. Here is how that report summarized the research on pornography’s effects on relationships; let’s see if it supports what the Porn Kills Love website said.

Pornography has a negative effect on marriage and long-term cohabitating couples, making them more vulnerable to divorce or dissolution. This, in turn, has negative health effects for the children involved. The use of pornography in the context of the marriage is largely confined to the husband. The wife is an occasional co-participant, reluctantly accepting the pornography use or being completely unaware of the husband’s personal use of pornography.

Women who have husbands or male partners who view pornography feel betrayed. When women view the pornography their partners are viewing, they can develop a lower self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, and begin to feel sexually undesirable. The more a woman perceives her husband or boyfriend using pornography, the more negative the woman rates their relationship in general and the lower she rates her overall sexual satisfaction.

(See Appendix B for a fuller summary of the findings of “The Impact of Pornography on Children” and a summary of a 2012 research review in the journal *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, “The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents.”)

Nearly all of our students hope to find true love. Many of them still dream of have a happy and lasting marriage. They should know what studies show. Pornography can destroy that dream.

## Pornography’s Effects on the Brain

How does pornography affect our brains? Why is it being called “the drug of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”? A key part of media literacy is understanding how any form of media affects us—our physical brain, our thinking processes, our emotions, every part of our functioning as human beings.



Fight the New Drug does a good job on its website of summarizing porn's effects on the brain. But the clearest explanation I have found of this is an article titled, "The Science Behind Pornography" (<http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/the-science-behind-pornography/18403>) by Dr. Kevin Majeres (pronounced "Majors") in the July 22, 2016 issue of *Mercatornet* ([www.mercatornet.com](http://www.mercatornet.com)), an Australian online magazine.

*MercatorNet* also recently published a provocative article, "Is Pornography a Public Health Crisis?" which presents different views on that question and different views on how to deal with pornography. You could use this article for classroom discussion to deepen students' critical thinking about this subject (<http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/is-pornography-a-public-health-crisis/17664>). You could discuss it with your children at home. The article reports a new grassroots movement in Australia, "Porn Harms Kids," that brings together parents, educators, academics and others in the battle against pornography. They just held a major conference on pornography at a leading Australian university.

Okay, back to Dr. Majeres: He is the Catholic psychiatrist at Harvard's Medical School that I referred to earlier as specializing in a virtue-based approach to treating pornography and other addictions. I think you could use his article with your students or children.



*Kevin Majeres, M.D. Dr. Majeres is a psychiatrist specialising in cognitive-behavioural therapy and a faculty member of Harvard Medical School.*

The article is based on a talk he gave to a Catholic men's group, so that makes it easy to understand. In his audience, there were surely some Catholic men who had struggled with pornography and who may have come to the talk because they wanted help. Here is some of what Dr. Majeres said to them:

He began by speaking about "vicious circles"—ones caused by vices—and "virtuous circles," ones based on virtues—on something good.

In behavioral therapy, we talk about behavioral momentum, which works a lot like physical momentum. If you ride your bike downhill, you will notice your momentum increasing. This makes it a lot easier to pedal, and the pedaling makes you go faster, which makes the pedaling easier; the momentum keeps growing. The problem with this kind of momentum is that it makes it harder and harder to slow down and control yourself. This is the kind of momentum we find in vicious circles. At first it seems benign [not harmful], but as it picks up speed, freedom shrinks. This process is at the core of all emotional and addictive disorders.

For a virtuous circle, consider a sport you love to play, or an instrument, or a skill. Think about what it was like the very first times you tried it — how does your performance compare to now? As you practiced, it became easier and easier to play; it also became more fun and rewarding, and your mastery increased. This is a virtuous circle. True rewards in life all come from virtuous circles.

“The purpose of morals, commandments, rules,” Dr. Majeres explained, “is to protect us from vicious circles. They tell us where NOT to pedal . . . But to be morally thriving, it is not enough to follow rules. We have to pursue the virtue that the commandment points out.”

So that’s a big idea we want to hold on to and have our students hold on to: If you want to be a good person and lead a good life, rules can help. They teach us right from wrong. But rules aren’t enough. **We need virtues in order to live by the rules.** We need virtues in order to turn knowledge into action.

Dr. Majeres continues: “When it comes to sexual behaviors, faith and reason can supply us with clear rules. But it is only by *loving the virtue of purity* that we can truly be motivated to pursue it, even when it is hard.”

“Purity,” of course, is a very old-fashioned word. On his website, “Overcoming Cravings” ([www.overcomingcravings.com](http://www.overcomingcravings.com)), Dr. Majeres explains what he means by it:

Purity is a state of peace in which your sexual desires and actions are in full agreement with your highest ideals.

We can begin to do that, Dr. Majeres says, through guided practice.

In the next part of his talk, Dr. Majeres explained what he called “The Science of Sexual Interest.” When our sexual desires are not governed by our highest ideals, he says, “the animal instincts regarding sex come to dominate.”

The question is whether sex is ruled by the upper brain or the lower brain. The upper brain is where rational thought occurs. The lower brain is where impulses and emotions come from.

Scientists have discovered that if you place a male rat in a cage with a receptive female, they will mate; but once done, the male rat will not mate more times, even if the female is still receptive. He loses all sexual interest. But if—right after he finishes with the first female—you put in a second receptive female, he will immediately mate again; and again a third, and so on, until he nearly dies. This effect has been found in every animal studied.

Still quoting Dr. Majeres:

This explains why men use pornography. Pornography's power comes from the way it tricks the man's lower brain. Pornography offers a man an unlimited number of seemingly willing females. Every time he sees the new partner, with each click [on Internet porn], it gears up his sex drive again.

This means that the lower brain actually comes to prefer pornography to real sex with a spouse. The reason has to do with a chemical called dopamine.

You've probably heard of dopamine. Much has been written about the role of dopamine in the problem of pornography. I found Dr. Majeres' explanation the best. Here's what he said to the men's group:

Dopamine is the drug of desire — when you see something desirable, your brain pours out dopamine, saying "Go for it!" So when someone clicks and sees a new pornographic image, he gets an enormous dopamine flood in his upper brain, causing a wild amount of electrical energy.

Each new image causes another flood of dopamine, time after time, click after click, as long as he continues. It's a dopamine binge.

But the brain can't keep up with this; it's too draining. The brain's synapses do NOT like being overstimulated with dopamine, so they respond by destroying some dopamine receptors. But after the dopamine binge is done, the brain is left feeling depleted.

This is why pornography causes a vicious circle. When someone views pornography, he gets overstimulated by dopamine; so his brain destroys some dopamine receptors. This makes him feel depleted, so he goes back to pornography. But having fewer dopamine receptors, this time it requires more to get the same dopamine thrill; but this causes his brain to destroy more receptors; so he feels an even greater need for pornography to stimulate him.

So guys start to find that they have to use pornography for longer and longer periods to have the same effect, and they have to visit more and more sites. Still, eventually they cannot get the same excitement as before. This alone is the number one reason not to get started with pornography.

What happens next, Dr. Majeres says, is that men often turn to more and more extreme forms of pornography, sometimes including violent porn and other things they would have found repulsive and disgusting before. They have rewired their brain—*actually changed the synapses in the brain*—to need the extreme forms of porn in order to get the excitement back up.

I encourage you to read the rest of the talk to learn how, as a psychiatrist, Dr. Majeres has helped people out of this trap *and* is teaching Harvard's Medical School students to do the same.

He says, “The good news is that most people who make a commitment to stop pornography entirely, ARE able to stop.”

He has developed modules that teach people, in very specific ways, how to practice the virtues they will need—such as reframing, mindfulness, and patience—to deal calmly with what can feel like an overwhelming temptation to go back to the pornography. “Reframing,” he explains, means seeing temptations as “opportunities for growth, rather than simply as threats.”

Viewing temptations as threats leads us to dread them. Dreading a time of craving makes it *more* likely that we will give in when the craving arrives. Dreading is incompatible with patience.

Dr. Majeres says that patience is *the* most important virtue we need in order to grow in freedom from any addiction. He explains:

You see trials as practice, and you use the trial to master the skills of self-control. This means seeing yourself as capable of growth—and seeing that the effort you put into the struggle, over time, will always bring proportionate growth.

Dr. Majeres concludes:

Temptations handled well produce the strength of virtues within us. The hardest trials are at the beginning. Gradually the habit is strengthened, and it gets easier and easier to live the virtue.

We need to share these insights with our students and our children. Dr. Majeres’ ideas are actually a combination of new insights from modern psychology—like “reframing” and having a “growth mindset” (“I can get better if I really work at it”)—and very old wisdom. Thousands of years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle said, “If you want to be kind, do acts of kindness. If you wish to be brave, perform acts of courage. If you want to have self-control, practice self-control.”

If our character education efforts are not changing our students’ behavior, then we are probably not spending enough time guiding them in practicing the virtues. Virtues are good habits. We can’t develop good habits without effort and practice. A lot of character education, unfortunately, is mostly talk, not action.

### **What Makes “Fight the New Drug” Effective Character Education?**

Let’s go back to Fight the New Drug and ask, “How does it put the principles of effective character education into practice?”

The Fight the New Drug and Porn Kills Love program is a good example of what I consider effective character and media literacy education. Here's why: It's designed to develop the three essential components of character—the head, the heart, and the hand.

To become a person of character is to become the best person we can be.

That involves *knowing the good* (understanding the nature of virtuous circles and vicious circles, for example), *loving the good* (strongly desiring to grow in the virtues, like purity), and *doing the good* (strengthening the virtues through practice, until they become habits).

Fight the New Drug and Porn Kills Love develop the “head part” of character by teaching the facts about pornography. They develop the “heart part” of character by making a pornography-free life attractive, a path to freedom and love. They also appeal to every person's desire to make a difference, to help others know the harm that porn does and avoid it like the plague. Finally, Fight the New Drug and Porn Kills Love develop the “hand part” of character by giving us tools for action.

### **Porn as a Social Justice Issue: Exposing the Industry's Dark Secrets**

One of the ways Fight the New Drug engages the head and heart and contributes to our desire to do something is exposing what really goes on in the porn industry. Here's what they say:

The pornography industry wants us to think porn is legitimate entertainment made by people who are doing it because they want to. But behind the camera is a world of violence, drugs, and human trafficking. With editing and off-screen coercion, pornographers can make it look like what's happening onscreen is being enjoyed. But the un-cut version is a different story. Porn actors are constantly threatened and emotionally and verbally abused by agents and directors to force them into doing things they don't want to do.

Dr. Peter Kleponis is a psychotherapist who has written several books about pornography and specializes in helping individuals and families recover from pornography addiction. In his book *Integrity Restored*, he points out that much of today's porn shows women being abused by one or more men. Women are forced to engage in rape scenes, verbal humiliation, group sex, bondage, and other degrading things. A 2013 study of the deaths of porn stars found that the overwhelming majority died young due to drugs, suicide, murder, alcohol abuse, and disease. The average life expectancy was 37 years.<sup>11</sup>

Pornography and prostitution are partners in crime. In a study of 854 women prostitutes in 9 countries, 49% said that porn films had been made of them *while they were engaged in prostitution*. 47% said they had been harmed by men who tried to force them to do things that these men had seen portrayed in porn.

Porn and prostitution fuel each other, Fight the New Drug says. They are both part of the sex trade.

I'd like to show you one final Fight the New Drug video—in which a former male porn star, who quit in 2011, tells the story of his descent into the industry and eventual redemption. This is a poignant video, very tastefully done, with a moving message and no graphic details, but you might want to save it for high school and up. <http://fightthenewdrug.org/video-the-most-successful-male-porn-st>

If this is the real world of the porn industry, then pornography is not just a public health issue. It's also a social justice issue, a human rights issue.

Most young people have a sense of justice. They get upset when they find out about people being abused. We should appeal to their sense of justice as we encourage them to think critically about pornography.

In educating our students about pornography or any other social problem, we should always challenge them to ask: How can I become part of the solution and not part of the problem? Making a positive difference in the world is a big part of what it means to have good character and be a responsible, contributing member of the human community.

Fight the New Drug doesn't leave that to chance. Its website urges young people to get involved. It lays out "8 Easy Ways to Make A Difference." Here are 4 of them:

- 1. Download the Fight the New Drug [browser extension](#)** and donate to the movement while you shop online.
- 2. Bring Us To You.** Fight the New Drug provides informative and entertaining school presentations that invite students to join the movement.
- 3. Spread The Word.** On the website you can [Download](#) the free *Harmful Effects of Pornography 2016 Research Guide* and share our [Get The Facts research page](#) to show people that porn absolutely kills love.
- 4. Download the Fortify App.** If you've found yourself wanting to quit watching 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.

Head, heart, and hand. Knowing the good, desiring the good, doing the good.

### **Using Good Movies to Develop the Head, Heart, and Hand**

Let's step back from educational and media literacy strategies like Fight the New Drug that deal *directly* with pornography.

I'd like to share with you the story of a character education experiment with inner-city kids in New York City.<sup>12</sup> Its goal was to try to develop *altruism*—the virtue of doing good for others without asking, “What’s in it for me?”

The virtue of altruism orients kids *toward the needs of others*. An orientation toward others is one of the most basic building blocks of character. It’s the opposite of selfishness. Selfishness is at the psychological core of using pornography; you’re not thinking of anybody else.

If we want to help our children resist the lure of pornography, *and* help others do the same, they’ll need *more* than critical thinking (media literacy) and *more* than self-control and patience. They’ll need many other basic virtues, like wanting to do good for others. We’ll need a character education program that develops character in the full sense.

Before this conference, the InterMedia organizers wrote to the speakers asking us, among other questions, “How can we use movies and television shows, not just as entertainment, but as ways to develop character strengths?”

As I tell you about the New York City altruism project, you’ll see that in the process of trying to develop altruism, the project also taught students to look at *movies* not just as entertainment but as having educational value—as opportunities to use their minds and develop their character.

I like this project for 3 other reasons: (1) I love movies myself; (2) It’s another good example of how to design a character education experience that—like Fight the New Drug—engages and develops head, heart, and hand; and (3) It shows how to *evaluate* whether what we have done with students, actually worked.

How do we *know* if our character education efforts are having any impact on students? Schools won’t make time for character education if they don’t have any evidence that it’s worth their time—that it produces results. They can tell easily whether students are learning math and reading, by their test scores. Is it possible to measure their growth in character?

The New York City project was the brainchild of Dr. Paul Vitz, who was at the time a psychology professor at New York University, and one of his doctoral students, Phil Scala.

For their project they chose seven racially and ethnically mixed classrooms of 8<sup>th</sup>-graders (13-year-olds), most of whom came from low-income families and tough New York City neighborhoods, where drugs and crime were common.

They decided to use stories—ones that showed altruism in attractive and dramatic ways. They knew that movies are the form of storytelling that young people today find most engaging. So, they created shortened, half-hour versions of seven feature films. Each movie presented a strong example of altruistic behavior.

These movies included classics such as:

- **"It's a Wonderful Life"** (the prayers and support of George Bailey's family, friends, and an angel dispel his despair and convince him his life has been worthwhile)
- **"The Miracle Worker"** (20-year-old Annie Sullivan finds a way to teach language to 7-year-old Helen Keller, who is blind, deaf, and dumb; freed from her psychological prison, Helen goes on to graduate from college and to promote the cause of the blind worldwide)
- **"Brian's Song"** (two professional football players, one white, one black, initially compete for the same position on the team, then become close friends and help each other through illness and injury, including Brian's fatal struggle with cancer).

The seven classes of 8<sup>th</sup>-graders met once a week, for seven weeks. Each class session began by watching one of the shortened movies. That was followed by a discussion:

- Who in the movie performed an altruistic act?
- What made it altruistic?
- How did it affect others?

Discussions also used analogies to help students understand the potential of an altruistic act to affect many people. For example: A rock thrown into a pond creates ripples, much as our altruistic deeds have positive effects on those who immediately benefit. Their kind actions, in turn, benefit others.

Class discussions also included role-playing. Students volunteered to act out an altruistic deed they had performed during the preceding week.

These were carefully crafted discussions, very important for developing a deep understanding of what altruism is (the head part of the virtue) *and* an attraction to it (the heart part).

Finally, and most important in the minds of the project leaders, all the students were given homework (aimed at the hand part of character):

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

Each student got a journal with a separate page for recording each good act, including:

- what was done
- why it was done
- how the persons helped responded.



Here are some examples of acts students that recorded in their journals:

I did the dishes for my brother (it was his turn).  
 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 straightened out the entire house when no one was home.  
 I tutored a 6<sup>th</sup>-grader in math.  
 I picked up litter in the school yard.  
 I gave some of my old clothes to the poor.

What were the results of this multi-dimensional character education experience?

- Students' pro-altruistic attitudes (how much they cared about being altruistic) increased significantly, as measured by their response, before and after the course, to questions such as, *"How many hours a week are you willing to donate to help people in this community?"*
- After the course was over, the regular teacher of these 8<sup>th</sup>-grade classes and the parents said that students continued to perform acts of altruism at school *and* home, with greater frequency than before.
- 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. One boy's comment typified these reactions: "I know I'm a good person because I do good things."

Vitz and Scala concluded that three things worked together to make their project successful:

1. adequate "dosage"—a long-enough intervention to have the desired impact on students' thinking, attitudes, and behavior
2. inspiring movies, followed by focused discussions, that helped students gain a clear understanding of altruism and its positive effects
3. enough practice—an altruistic act performed *every day* over the seven-week period—for good habits to begin to form and for those habits to have an impact on students' "sense of identity" (as reflected in the boy's comment, "I know I'm a good person because I do good things").

## Love and Life at the Movies

“Love and Life at the Movies” is a published curriculum that also makes use of classic and contemporary films to engage students as ethical thinkers and choice-makers. Developed by Dr. Onalee McGraw of the Educational Guidance Institute ([www.educationalguidanceinstitute.com](http://www.educationalguidanceinstitute.com)), lesson plans for each film promote critical analysis and writing about character issues.

“Love and Life” has been used in high school and junior high school classrooms, after-school programs, and also detention homes for delinquents. McGraw comments:

The films are chosen for their power to depict personal virtues such as integrity, courage, and love, but also to model the meaning of moral and social bonds with the larger community. The films contain no bad language, violence, or sexual references.

A teacher who used the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” said:

Some of my kids resisted it at first because it’s black and white, but it won them over. Some said that they, like George Bailey in the movie, had been tempted to commit suicide. They were touched by the film’s message: that each of us makes a difference in the lives of others, whether we realize it or not.

McGraw says they’ve found that it works best, when the movies are shown in communities and churches, to have small discussion groups led by teens who have already viewed the movie and worked on discussion questions ahead of time.

One 16-year-old boy, after viewing and discussing “Roman Holiday,” had this to say:

This program has changed the way I feel about girls. I now have respect for them. I also learned what it means to be a real man from watching Joe Bradley and how I should act in any situation.

Teach With Movies ([www.TeachWithMovies.com](http://www.TeachWithMovies.com)) is an online resource that capitalizes on the power of films. It catalogues hundreds of movies and offers lesson plans for using movies to explore character themes.

Obviously, we can and should also watch good movies with our kids at home—and discuss what we each liked and took from a film. This can greatly enrich the shared experience and educational value of watching a good movie as a family.

## What Else Can Parents Do?

As Common Sense Media ([www.commonesesensemedia.org](http://www.commonesesensemedia.org)) points out, “Despite dramatic changes in media use, TV still reigns supreme in children’s media lives. Television can

very easily take over as our children's main character educator in two ways: (1) by shutting down family communication, and (2) by bombarding our kids with bad values.

Kids learn values (what's right) and virtues (the habit of doing what's right) through social interactions. Especially vital is face-to-face communication with significant adults, particularly parents. Like a thief in the night, TV steals precious communication time from us and our children. It sharply reduces the crucial conversation—the back and forth discussion, as well as the moments of sharing and intimacy—through which so much of our children's moral learning takes place and their character is formed.

But lost communication is only half of the problem of watching too much TV in the family. The other half is the negative models and moral messages—and their effects on children's attitudes and behavior.

In 1992, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a major report, *Television and Behavior*, summarizing more than 2,500 studies during the previous decade. It found “overwhelming evidence” that television violence increases children's aggression.

Researchers are also beginning to look at the effects of TV sex on teens' sexual attitudes and behavior. The Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine reported a study of the sexual behavior of nearly 5,000 15- to 16-year-olds.<sup>13</sup> They found that:

- Overall, teens who watched more than two hours of television a day were significantly more likely to have had sex than those who watched less TV.
- Among teens whose parents disapproved of their having sex, those who watched more than two hours of television a day were 70 percent more likely to have had sex than their lighter-watching peers.

In other words, regardless of parents' own values regarding teen sex, their teens appeared to take their cues not from what their parents said, but from how sex was portrayed on television

### **Working Out Family Media Guidelines**

Here's the big idea we want to communicate to our kids (and a family meeting is a good way to do this):

The use of the media in the family is a privilege, not a right. That privilege has to be exercised in a way that is consistent with our family values. So, for any particular TV show, movie, magazine, music CD, video game, Internet site, or social media, here's the question: *Is it consistent with what we value and believe as a family?*

The specific guidelines we settle on will vary from family to family. I know many families—including those of our own two sons (who between them have 14 children)—that do

not make commercial television available at all to their children. Others limit viewing to a small number of approved programs, often recorded and then watched later.

In formulating your family's guidelines, you may wish to consider including the following. It's wise to write them out, in a posted "Media Contract" that everyone signs:

1. The use of any media in our home should be consistent with our beliefs and values as a family.
2. Watching TV is a special event, not a regular routine. In general, it is also a family event, not a private pastime.
3. No TV before school, before homework is done, or during meals.
4. Always ask *permission* to turn on the TV; watch *only* approved programs.
5. Certain nights are "quiet nights"; the TV stays off so we can focus on family activities and doing others things. (Choose these nights together as a family).
6. All video games must be previewed by a parent, and limited to agreed-upon times.
7. No mobile devices at meals. Unless permission is granted, no use of mobile devices after agreed-upon times (set a reasonable curfew).
8. Pornographic and hate web sites are off limits and blocked by an Internet screen installed by the family (digitally savvy kids know how to get around most of these controls, which is why our talking with them about these issues is essential for developing the most important control—their conscience).
9. *Internet rules*: No use of the Internet without parental approval. You must have parental permission to download anything. Do not share your password with friends or over email. Never physically meet someone you have met online. If a stranger tries to involve you in an online relationship, tell Mom or Dad right away.
10. *Movies*: No R-rated movies and no PG-13 or PG movies without parental permission. (Parents will check out the content and rating of current films on [www.screenit.com](http://www.screenit.com) and [www.kidsinmind.com](http://www.kidsinmind.com)).

Make sure that your kids understand *your reasons* for these guidelines; you might say something like this:

We want you to be able to watch good TV programs and movies and to use other media. But there's a lot of not good stuff that you shouldn't be letting into your mind, heart, and soul. Parents who care about their kids care enough to set limits on these things, just as we have rules in other areas. It's because we love you.

Finally, for help with questions such as . . .

- “What should I do if my child has been accidentally exposed to pornography?”
- “What should I do if my child has been purposely viewing pornography?”
- “What should I do if I suspect that my child has been viewing pornography?”

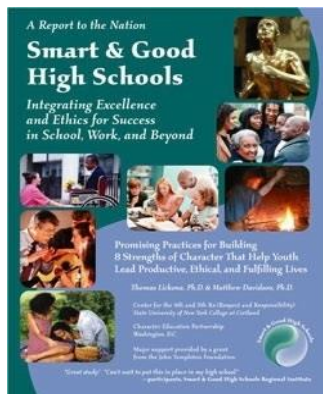
. . . I highly recommend the very readable and comprehensive book, *Integrity Restored*, by the Catholic psychotherapist Dr. Peter C. Kleponis, on helping families win the battle against pornography. His newest book, *Integrity Starts Here!*, explains in detail his 7-point program for recovery from pornography addiction, including guidelines for prayer and spiritual growth.

There is no more toxic legacy of the sexual revolution than pornography. But in this battle, we can take heart from the progress being made and share that good news with our colleagues, students, and families.

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## APPENDIX A

**Smart & Good High Schools study** ([www.cortland.edu/character](http://www.cortland.edu/character))



**National study of award-winning high schools**

This was a 2-year study that my colleague Matt Davidson and I carried out of 24 awarding-winning high schools—big and small, urban and suburban, public and private, secular and religious—in every part of the United States. We wanted to find out, what were the best high schools doing to develop good character in their students?

We ended up writing a 250-page report that you can download from our website. It describes more than 100 best practices in character education. It includes media literacy practices (under “Critical Thinker” in Chapter 5) and character-based sex education practices (under “Self-Disciplined Person” in Chapter 5).

## **APPENDIX B**

The following is a summary of each of the three major parts of the October 2015 American College of Pediatricians report, “The Impact of Pornography on Children.”  
<https://www.acped.org/?s=The+Impact+of+Pornography>

### **1. Effects on Children**

Pornography exposure for children and adolescents has become almost ubiquitous. In a 2010 survey of English students between 14 to 16 years old, almost one third claimed that their first exposure to Internet pornography was at 10 years old or younger. A large survey of American young people revealed that 51% of males and 32% of females claimed to have viewed pornography for the first time before they were 13. In a 2012 Australian study of pornography use, men who were frequent pornography users said that their first exposure was between the ages of 11 to 13 years old.

Grade school children are sometimes exposed to pornography accidentally when they view material on the Internet. They may also come into contact with a parent’s or other close adult’s pornographic material. Sexual predators have purposefully exposed young children to pornography for the purpose of grooming the children for sexual exploitation.

Pornography exposure at these young ages often results in anxiety for the child. Children also report feelings of disgust, shock, embarrassment, anger, fear, and sadness after viewing pornography. They may become obsessed with acting out adult sexual acts that they have seen, and this can be very disruptive and disturbing to the child’s peers who witness or are victimized by this behavior. Children under 12 years old who have viewed pornography are statistically more likely to sexually assault their peers.

### **Effects on Older Teens and Young Adults**

The effects of pornography exposure upon older adolescents and young adults were recorded in a series of studies conducted by Zillman and Bryant in the 1980’s. Several factors make these studies noteworthy. First, they were controlled randomized studies [subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental group and control group]. Second, they were conducted before the age of Internet pornography, so the participants would likely have had less exposure to pornography compared to the average young adult today.

These studies involved recruiting college students and non-college students from the community. Subjects in the experimental group viewed pornographic material for a period of 6 weeks. The control group was exposed to common movie and television content over the same period of time. Afterwards, participants were asked a series of questions to evaluate their attitudes regarding relationship and family issues.

The following observations were noted regarding the college students exposed to pornography, compared to the control group:

1. Male subjects demonstrated increased callousness toward women.
2. Subjects [male and female] considered the crime of rape less serious.
3. Subjects were more accepting of non-marital sexual activity.
4. Subjects became more interested in more extreme and deviant forms of pornography.
5. Subjects were more likely to say they were dissatisfied with their sexual partner.
6. Subjects were more accepting of sexual infidelity in a relationship.
7. Subjects valued marriage less and were twice as likely to believe marriage may become obsolete.
8. Male subjects experienced a decreased desire to have children, and female subjects experienced a decreased desire to have a daughter.
9. Subjects showed a greater acceptance of female promiscuity.

### **Effects on Marriage**

Pornography has a negative effect on marriage and long-term cohabitating couples, making them more vulnerable to divorce or dissolution. This, in turn, has negative health effects for the children involved. The use of pornography in the context of the marriage is largely confined to the husband; the wife being an occasional co-participant, reluctantly accepting the pornography use or being completely unaware of the husband's personal use of pornography.

Women who have husbands or male partners who view pornography feel betrayed. When women view the pornography their partners are viewing, they can develop a lower self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, and begin to feel sexually undesirable. The more a woman perceives her husband or boyfriend using pornography, the more negative the woman rates their relationship in general and the lower she rates her overall sexual satisfaction.

**The following is a summary of “The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research,” *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 2012, 19: 99-122.**

“The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents” focused in depth on just the teenage years. It was published in the journal *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* by four researchers from three U.S. universities.<sup>14</sup> They analyzed dozens of studies of pornography conducted in diverse parts of the world—such as China, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States—between 2005 and 2012.

These researchers point out that the teenage years are a time of “critical and significant changes” in many areas: physical development (including brain development), emotional development, intellectual development, social development, spiritual development, and sexual development. Because teenagers are undergoing major developmental changes in all these areas, they are especially vulnerable to the impact of sexually explicit material.

Here are some of the findings that were consistent across different cultures:

- The negative impact of Internet pornography on adolescent sexual behavior—including compulsive, addictive, and even criminal behavior—appears to be a global trend.
- Pornography has become acceptable to most teens. However, one study found that teenagers’ beliefs about pornography “differed greatly” depending on their other beliefs and value.
- The more frequently teens view sexually explicit Internet material, the more they think about sex, the stronger their interest in sex, and the more they become distracted by their thoughts about sex.
- The more teens consume pornography, the more likely they are to approve of casual sex and to start having sex in their early teens.
- The more teens view pornography, the more likely they are to “view women as sex objects.”
- Girls tend to report feeling physically inferior to the women they see in pornographic material.
- Boys tend to worry that they may not be able to perform as the men in these media do.
- Most studies find that the more teens watch porn, the more likely they are to engage in high-risk sexual behaviors such as anal sex, sex with multiple partners, and sex while using drugs.
- When teens view pornography that depicts violence, they are more likely to become aggressive in their own sexual behavior.
- The more teens use porn, the more likely they are to engage in delinquent behavior, become depressed, and have trouble bonding emotionally with their parents and other caregivers.

## Gender Differences

What about differences between males and females?

Many studies report that males are much more likely than females to use pornography, to do so repeatedly, to use it for sexual excitement and masturbation, to initiate its use rather than be introduced to it by an intimate partner, and to view it alone and in same-sex groups.<sup>15</sup> One estimate is that 87 percent of persons addicted to pornography are men.

Overall, women are more likely to become addicted to pornographic material that involves relationships, such as erotic literature, sexual chat rooms, and so on. Women under 30, however, appear to prefer visual types of pornography. This is leading some psychologists to speculate that experience in the pornographic culture is rewiring the brains of women.<sup>16</sup>



Increasingly, young girls are accessing hard pornography. A Netvalue Report on Minors found that by the turn of the century, U.S. youth under 17 were spending 65% more time on adult pornography Internet sites than they did on game sites. Four of the ten who had visited a pornographic site were girls.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> W. Bradford Wilcox, et al. *Why Marriage Matters: Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). (New York, NY: Institute for American Values, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> “How a Rolling Sexual Revolution Is Crushing Freedom,” interview with Gabriele Kuby, *MercatorNet* (July 8, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> For an insightful paper that discusses evidence of the harmful psychological effects of masturbation (paralleling the harmful effects of pornography), see “Harmful Psychological Effects of Common Sexual Practices” by Paul Vitz, Ph.D. ([1vitz.ips@divinemercy.edu](mailto:1vitz.ips@divinemercy.edu)).

<sup>4</sup> Pamela Paul, *Pornified: How Pornography is Transforming Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families*. (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2005).

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Peter C. Kleponis for this list, provided in his book, *Integrity Starts Here: A Catholic Approach to Restoring Sexual Integrity* (Denver, CO: Outskirts Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Belinda Luscombe, “Porn and the Threat to Virility,” *Time* (April 11, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Bishop Robert Barron, “Porn and the Curse of Total Sexual Freedom,” *Word on Fire* (April 19, 2016). Robert Barron is Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. He is also the founder of [Word On Fire](#) and the creator and host of the 10-part documentary series, “CATHOLICISM” ([www.catholicismwordonfire.org](http://www.catholicismwordonfire.org)). His 350 online video commentaries have received over 9.5 million views worldwide. See his YouTube channel [here](#). To access Bishop Barron’s article, “Porn and the Curse of Total Sexual Freedom,” go to <http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/education/chastity-education/porn-and-the-curse-of-total-sexual-freedom.html>

<sup>8</sup> T. J. Morrow, *Achieving Chastity in a Pornographic World* (New Hope, KY: New Hope Publications, 2006), 3.

<sup>9</sup> T. J. Morrow.

<sup>10</sup> Fight the New Drug, *Fortify: The Fighter’s Guide to Overcoming Pornography Addiction*. (Familius, 2015). [www.familius.com](http://www.familius.com)

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Peter C. Kleponis, *Integrity Restored: Helping Catholic Families Win the Battle Against Pornography*. (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Paul C. Vitz and Philip P. Scala, "Evaluating a Short Curriculum for Teaching Altruism," unpublished study, Department of Psychology, New York University. Available from Paul C. Vitz, The Institute for the Psychological Sciences, Suite 511, 2001 Jefferson Davis Highway, Arlington, VA 22202.

<sup>13</sup> [www.webmd.com/parentnews](http://www.webmd.com/parentnews), April 4, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Eric W. Owens, Richard J. Behun, Jill C. Manning, & Rory C. Reid, "The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research," 2012, 19, 99-122.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Flood, "Exposure to Pornography among Youth in Australia," *Journal of Sociology*, 2007, 43, 45-60.

<sup>16</sup> Kleponis, 2014.