

This summer's blockbuster film *Spiderman: Homecoming* contains a worrying reference to teenagers viewing pornography.

While a review for parents lauded the virtuous messages in the Marvel movie, it warned against the presence of obscenities, profanity, and a troubling scene: a student in junior high covers up online spying by telling an inquisitive prefect that he was "just looking at porn."

Such a casual allusion to pornography could attract children to porn, quickly leading to addiction. Would filmmakers make the same joke about drugs? Of course they wouldn't. We know how harmful they can be. And so is porn.

The pervasiveness of porn in our culture is desensitizing us. This depraved segment of the movie industry is actually a bigger business than mainstream Hollywood. Many contributors to commercial films participate in both segments.

Society is discussing the negative impacts of pornography with more frequency and at every level. Pope Francis has addressed the dangers of pornography more times than any other Pope. The State of Utah declared that pornography is a "public health crisis." Belinda Luscombe's article "Porn and the Threat to Virility" made the front cover of *Time* magazine.

The statistics on the consequences of porn on marriage and family life are stunning. In 56% of divorces in the United States, a major factor is one spouse's continued use of pornography. Pornography consumption has been correlated with a 300% increase in infidelity in marriage.

The most vulnerable victims of pornography are children. The largest consumers of Internet pornography are children aged 12 to 17. The majority of children, both boys and girls, access pornography as early as

eight years old. To hide their Internet use from their parents or guardian, 67% of youths admit to clearing their browser history.

In both children and adults, pornography stimulates mixed emotions and endocrinal responses. These combined feelings don't make sense and aren't compatible, such as sexual arousal mixed with shock, fear, and anger; and sexual climax mixed with guilt, shame, frustration, and despair. Porn prematurely sexualizes children and establishes expectations—instant gratification, eternal supermodel looks, and deviant practices—that cannot be matched in real life. Much like cocaine, porn use directly lights up the reward pathways.

How should we respond?

The Catholic Women's League of Canada is preparing to ask the Federal Government to impose age verification controls to lock children out of pornographic websites.

If you or someone you know is struggling with pornography, there are websites that can help. The e-book "Your Brain on Porn" outlines the damaging effects of viewing sexually explicit material and suggests how to abstain from it. There are apps to block access to porn. This new addiction has corresponding 12-step programs to break its stronghold. Matt Fradd, an expert on getting free of dependency on porn, offers several resources.

In one of the beatitudes, Jesus described who is truly happy: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

To be pure in heart implies that we direct our love wholly toward the good of another person. Love is a fundamental passion and it is always evoked by the attraction of the good. Love is a very good thing!

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines love as “to will the good of another.” But to live love as it’s intended can be complicated and a real struggle, because pure love is demanding. As children of God, though, this is the high destiny to which we are called. Pure love is possible to achieve because God loved us first. And God made us for the joy that comes from a clean and undivided heart.

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