

Pornography: The Last and Maybe the Most Significant “Safe Environment” Battle

Mary Beth Hanus

Safe Environment Coordinator

Archdiocese of Omaha, NE



As a church, we have moved “mountains” to create positive institutional changes to provide a “Safe Environment” for all. In fact, probably 99.9 percent of the time, the term “Safe Environment” invokes a recall of trainings, background checks and policies to keep kids safe. If we were a secular institution we could bask in this accomplishment believing that all we need to do is continue on with the status quo and we will keep our children safe.

But we are **Church** and not a secular institution. As **Church**, we need to realize that although the protection of the physical, sexual and emotional well being of our children is essential, so is their “spiritual” protection. The “care of the soul” is the core to our faith and salvation.

Pornography is one of the most blatant and aggressive assailants on the souls of our children and faith community. Pornography today is light years away from the pornography of the past in its perversion, accessibility and anonymous nature. There are over 42 million pornographic Web sites and more than 20,000 images of child pornography posted online every week. Studies show that 12-17 year olds are among the top consumers of Internet pornography with 11-year-olds being the average age of first exposure. With such statistics there are two vital questions we need to ask ourselves.

How did we get here? There are multitudes of theories, but a gradual and then bolder shift in social attitudes has made the soil ripe for pornography to flourish beyond imagination. The high importance of pleasure, image and “materialism” coupled with the clear disconnect of the body from the person has produced a culture of “takers” and an attitude of “anything goes as long as no one gets hurt.” This plays out on TV in advertisements and prime time shows, as well as the movie industry. Quick recognition of what is pornographic does not happen in such an environment, especially for youth.

What do we do to put light on this silent but devastating crisis? We as a **Church** need to recognize that this is as significant a crisis as the sexual abuse scandal. We need to promote awareness, education and supportive resources to battle this problem. We need to avoid believing someone else will do it; postponing action until we are less busy or have more resources or lastly doing nothing because of discouragement by the magnitude of the problem.