

Living in a Sexualised Culture

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In an illuminating article 'The new Era of Infidelity' (Kidspot.com.au: 4 October 10, 2015), psychotherapist Paul Reid commented on the idea of the internal compass. "In the past people found a certain stability in the sanctity of marriage in the nuclear family model, ... These days society is much more permissive so it becomes harder for people to know where the limits are. There has to be an orienting principle - people want others to give them answers as to how they should live their lives, but you have to take responsibility for your own desires. You can't blame sites like Ashley Madison. It is up to you to be self-responsible."

Where is our moral compass today for people and particularly young people? Quite a few years back now I interviewed a number of school age children for a project on beliefs and values, and the question I have often reflected on from that time is, 'how do people make ethical decisions', especially in the moral vacuum that thrives in the sexualised international culture we live in today.

While, there has always been sexual temptation, the simple fact is that we live in a heightened age of sexual awareness. Today visual stimulation is far more of an issue, especially for men, because the proliferation of pornography through the internet means that it has become easier and easier to present sex as a never ending package of desires to be filled, and to increasingly make what were once bizarre sexual acts seem common place. The World Wide Web is well named; a web it can be, not only fraught with visual but also aural and text stimulation. The pace of change due to technology has meant that pornography is now more available than ever before and thus available to people younger than ever before.

Fantine sings in Les Miserables –

*There was a time when men
were kind
When their voices were soft
And their words inviting
There was a time when love
was blind
And the world was a song
And the song was exciting
There was a time
Then it all went wrong*

Author and Commentator Steve Biddulph has written about this theme of a lost time for children in terms of developmental sexual understanding, highlighting especially the implications for girls.

"Many boys learn their sexuality from porn, and fixate not on deep connection, or tender passion, but instead on treating girls like sacks of meat. Distressed girls tell counsellors of gentle boys suddenly becoming callous and hurting them because they think that's how sex is done. There is something special being lost here. For many young people, sex has become a performance, overlaid with worry about 'How do I look? What tricks do they expect me to perform? How do I compare with others?' Separating sex from personhood is what sexualisation does. It's robbing us of closeness. Little wonder we have one of the most depressed and lonely generations of young people ever." ('Sexualisation of the young is becoming society's cancer', Sydney Morning Herald, February 26, 2013)

Of course, these issues are not new, there is nothing new to visual temptation and no-one is immune. One of the significant examples in the bible is King David. He watched Bathsheba and continued to watch, and as we know, his initial visual fascination led to a web of sin, including what would now be regarded as conspiracy to commit murder, resulting in the Lord sending the prophet Nathan to denounce him.

I can simply say that the solution is just avoid the internet, but in an interconnected virtual world that is probably nearly impossible today, especially for the generations growing up who have complete access through their mobile phones. If the internet is a problem you may need to seek professional help and perhaps sadly but also helpfully, there are more Christian counsellors



around today specialising in helping people with internet pornography addiction. One counsellor I know has now mostly pastors as clients.

The psalmist asked this question "How can a young person stay on the path of purity?" (Psalm 119: 9a) and also provided a helpful answer. "By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

It may sound very basic, but recalling the words of Scripture at times of temptation has amazing power. Dwelling in the word generates the fruit of the Spirit, and this is what we want to see more in our young people and in our selves today. Yes we can say we have the "right to do anything", but surely even the most basic moral compass says "but not everything is beneficial." We need a new appreciation of how important our bodies really are and also how important the bodies of others are.

"The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body... Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies." (1 Corinthians 6: 13b, 18-20, NIV)