

Innocence for Sale

Every year, new words are introduced into the English vernacular. Some are pre-existing words that take on special significance due to national or world events, while other words are manufactured to describe a developing social trend or political phenomenon.

Words like “bailout,” “climate change,” and “Al Franken” come to mind—all words that I could care less if I ever hear again. But by far, the most disturbing new word to be uttered over the past 18 to 24 months—“pornification”—is used to describe the increased sexualizing of popular culture with a particular emphasis on mass media geared towards young people.

I first heard the word referenced by conservative radio talk show host and author Laura Ingraham. In February 2008, *Pornification: Sex & Sexuality in Media Culture* (Berg Publishers) was released as an academic study on the topic. When people within the world of secular higher education notice something, you know it’s got to be pretty bad.

If you don’t believe me, just watch MTV for five minutes. If that’s too obvious and cliché for you, go down the dial and check out the average original program on TNT, FX, Spike TV or most broadcast television after 9 p.m. EST.

Another indication of our overly sexualized culture can be found on Myspace where the conversation between teens and the pictures used for personal profile sites often border on pornographic.

It would require a series of blogs to chronicle all the specific instances detailing just how bad it’s gotten in this country. But when I read the story about Natalie Dylan last week, my heart literally sank to an all-time low.

In case you haven’t heard about this yet, Dylan is a 22-year-old college student from San Diego, Calif., who is auctioning off her virginity. Ironically, she already has a bachelor’s degree in Women’s Studies and plans to use the money to pay for graduate school. The highest bid to date is a mindboggling

\$3.8 million.

Once she gets through graduate school, get this: Dylan aspires to pursue a career in marriage and family counseling! Since most divorces occur due to matters of money and/or sex, her one-time foray into the world of prostitution should give her studies a jumpstart. But what kind of advice does Dylan expect to give her clients one day? How will anyone be able to take her seriously?

Perhaps this is just a publicity stunt meant to generate cash via other means. She has already signed a book deal and no doubt other nefarious offers will be forthcoming. Yet sadly, Dylan is not the first to offer her virginity for the highest bidder. Several other young women have already done the same with an unusually high number of cases in the United Kingdom.

You might say that Dylan and others like her have put their innocence up for sale. But let's not kid ourselves here. The innocence of the last two or three generations of young people in this country has been methodically pimped out by Hollywood and its willing accomplice, the mainstream media.

And even when a handful of brave souls stand up to the entertainment industry and actually take it to task, the tiresome Hollywood elites pop off with their spiel to parents and how they need to do a better job monitoring what their children are watching at home, in the theatres and on the internet. Certainly that's true to a point, but in the new age of technological access, dumbed-down FCC broadcast regulations, the music industry's flat-out refusal to police itself and the movie business' daily pushing of the proverbial envelope, even the most vigilant parents can't shield their children from every negative media influence.

I don't have daughters, but I do have three nieces (two of them teenagers). I'm also the youth pastor over a small group that includes several teenage girls. When I think about a young woman like Natalie Dylan, I can't help but wonder what kind of pressures these teenage girls are facing every day. Do I think that the selling of one's virginity will become some sort of national epidemic? Not really. But we should all be

alarmed by the fact that someone would actually consider doing so and that the validity of such an act is being debated instead of widely condemned.

Since most *Charisma* readers are likely regular church attendees and committed followers of Christ, I would imagine the response to this blog might be of disgust at our culture or perhaps hopelessness at the widespread nature of the problem.

But be careful not to be deceived into believing that it can't affect your children or your church's teenagers. Many studies have shown that church-ed young people are just as susceptible to the sexualizing of our society. They struggle to fight off the onslaught of lust and physical desire just like any guy or girl their age.

While I don't purport to be an expert in this area, there are a few simple things that I believe we can do to guard our kids from these attacks.

First, they need to be taught to value and respect their bodies. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 tells us to, "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple 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 honor God with your body" (NIV).

Secondly, they need to understand that their identity is in Christ—not in their relationships. In Romans 8:17, for example, it says that we are "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."

Finally, they must have a proper view of who God is and how much He loves them. This can be difficult for the girl who has a poor, perhaps abusive relationship with her father or one who has no father figure at all. But Psalm 33:5 reminds us that "the earth is full of his unfailing love."

Beyond those tools, we must all begin to pay closer attention to our own media consumption habits. What example are we setting for the next generation and even for our peers? It's

hard to preach sexual purity while simultaneously glazing over our own poor entertainment choices.

While many men and women much smarter than I have written informative books on this topic, I hope that the simplicity of these steps will help us all take a more proactive role in the fight against this destructive “pornification” of our great country.

I also pray that Natalie Dylan (and others like her who might be tempted to sell their innocence all the while jeopardizing their future) will change her mind before it’s too late. And even if she goes through with her plans, there is still a way for virtue to be restored. That’s the beauty of God’s grace. It can cover a multitude of sins and pave the way for new beginnings.

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