

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, “**Never ask a fish what water is like.**” A comparable modern version might be to ask our children “**What’s living in a media saturated culture like?**” They would likely respond, “**Let me Google that.**” Technological advances have ushered in the dawn of a new digital age and with it an unprecedented access to digital media of every kind. No other generation in the history of the world has ever grown up in a more media saturated culture. Never before have we been given the capacity to be entertained by the media of our choice anywhere at anytime on demand.

A more telling question we could be asking is, “**How has constant media exposure adversely affected your growth as a person and child of God?**” This however is not a question to be answered from inside the fish bowl. Kids don’t understand how this massive flood of media is shaping who they are and how they interact with the world around them. They couldn’t possibly begin to comprehend the profound impact it is making nor are they capable of scrutinizing and self-regulating in order to avoid negative consequences.

So do we have reason to be concerned about the QUANTITY and CONTENT of the media our children are consuming?

- With regard to the amount of time children spend consuming media and after an undoubtedly rigorous scrutiny of multiple reputable studies the **American Academy of Pediatrics** summarized their findings in the following way.

*“Studies have shown that **excessive** media use can lead to attention **problems**, school **difficulties**, sleep and eating **disorders**, and **obesity**. In addition, the Internet and cell phones can provide platforms for **illicit** and **risky** behaviors.”*

- With specific regard to the amount of time a child uses media the **American Academy of Pediatrics** uses words like **problems**, **difficulties**, and **disorders**. Their findings undergird the idea that too much of anything can be harmful.
- According to psychologist Dr. Mack R. Hicks author of ‘*The Digital Pandemic: Reestablishing Face-to-Face Contact in the Electronic Age*’ “In the last six years the rate of diagnosis of ADHD has jumped **15%** according to data from the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**.” He cited ‘excessive media usage’ as a likely factor for kids who may not be genetically predisposed to have ADHD yet begin exemplifying symptoms. In connection with this factor he also mentions how kids spend half the time outside that they did in 1992 and that only 6% of kids today will play outside on their own.
- Excessive media consumption is harmful to a child’s physical and psychological health. For this reason the AAP has suggested that “**Television and other entertainment media should be avoided for infants and children under age 2**” and that strict time limits for older children be imposed.

- We all know that restricting a child's media time is about as popular as announcing a moratorium on eating sugary foods but in the interest of their health we need to maintain a strong resolve. The simple fact is that the average kid spends way more time consuming media than could be reasonably considered acceptable.

According to a 2010 '**Kaiser Family Foundation Study**' children between the ages of **8-18** average a daily media consumption of **7 ½** hours. By multitasking, employing several forms of media simultaneously, this average jumps to **10 hours and 45 minutes** per day. That works out to **73 hours** of media per week totaling and unbelievable **3,822 hours** annually. During that 10-year period from **8-18** that's **4 YEARS** of 24 hours per day non-stop media consumption! Nearly **½** of their lives will be spent under the direct influence of media.

- Besides "*attention **problems**, school **difficulties**, sleep and eating **disorders**, and **obesity***" can all this media harm our children spiritually?
- Our word '**MEDIA**' is the plural of the Latin '**medium**' or middle, the notion is that of an '**intermediate agency**' or '**channel of communication**'. Media is simply a tool in the hands of a communicator. It is innocuous or insidious based upon the communicator utilizing it. The mediums of Television, Movies, Videos, Music, and Video Games are not inherently good or bad they are merely communication tools. Their creators and the intended and actual consequences in the lives of their recipients determine their value.
- **KIDS LEAVING CHURCH** - America is currently experiencing a disturbing trend marked by an enormous exodus of Christian youth from the church. Roughly **70-75%** of Christian kids raised in Christian homes by Christian parents just like us are abandoning church after leaving high school (see survey data at Barna and USA Today). We all scratch our heads and wonder why this generation seems to be doing what previous generations didn't.
- **Media Research Center**, Special Report titled "**America: A Nation in Moral and Spiritual Confusion**" "*The higher a person's level of education, the likelier he is to consider the media an important influence on moral values. 69 percent of people with postgraduate degrees and **67 percent** of college graduates consider the media influential, but only **59 percent** of people with high school degrees or less do so.*" (**The more educated you are the more likely you are to understand that media consumption significantly shapes a person's values.**)
- Could this disturbing trend be the result of this generation's saturation with value shaping media influences that are either **antagonistic** or **indifferent** towards the Christian worldview?
- **ANTAGONISTIC** - Many of the views conveyed through our modern educational and entertainment media are either overtly or subtly attacking our Christian faith. Whether it is by the promotion of billions of years of evolution, the equality and validity of all religions, or the approval of biblically condemned practices such as lying, greed, pride, adultery, and homosexuality the Christian worldview is under constant assault.

- **INDIFFERENT** - In addition to outright antagonism towards our faith modern secular media also treats Christianity with **indifference**. The value conveyed by secular media, media that doesn't make Christ and His mission the center of our existence, is that Christianity is **irrelevant**. This happens to be one of the main objections cited by youth who are leaving the church. Their Christian faith hasn't just been attacked by the voices they have filled their hearts with it has been **marginalized** and ignored. I think most Christian parents would be proactive in censoring any media influences that are overtly antagonistic towards the faith we're trying to instill in our children's hearts but do we consider the impact that a media indifferent toward Christ makes? When our kids are ingesting media that isn't born out of the centrality of Christ as the meaning and essence of life then they are being counseled to marginalize Him in the 'real world'. This is the thrust of secularization, that religion may be fine for some but it must be kept to one's self and out of the public square. To openly devote one's life to faith in Christ and allow it to affect the way you live is extremist, not normal, and doesn't make one fit for the world we live in.
- *"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters."* **Matthew 12:30** In this passage Jesus makes it abundantly clear that anyone who isn't devoted to Him and actively participating in His gathering of souls is actually working against Him. In other words the secular media's indifference towards Christ isn't really indifference at all, it is calculated opposition to Him. Furthermore it goes beyond the people creating the media to the spirit controlling them.
- The Bible isn't silent about the spirit who works through the systems of this lost world. As Christians who have our residency in Heaven it's sometimes easy to forget that we live in a war zone. We are often referred to in scripture as soldiers who must fight the good fight of faith but we need to be reminded about whom we're up against and what's at stake.
- *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:* **1 Peter 5:8** Peter warns us that we have a real enemy who presents a real threat and that we should be serious about avoiding the danger. When it comes to how we live our lives we must be as 'defensive drivers' always on the lookout for probable danger.
- **Four points about Satan and his intermediary agents**

1. -Satan is the inventor and master of the art of deception.

John 8:44 - *Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

Satan has spent thousands of years perfecting his craft of deception and only God's truth can keep us safe from its persuasion. You and I can't out smart or out think him, we must trust the truth God gives us in His word.

2. -Satan is the dominant influence in the lives of unbelievers.

2 Corinthians 4:4 - ... *the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*

Satan is the god of those who don't follow Jesus. They are captivated by his lies and blind to the truth.

3. - Satan manipulates unbelievers to accomplish his objectives.

2 Timothy 2:26 –...(they) ***having been held captive by him to do his will.***

Satan uses many devices to hold unbelievers captive and through his various means he forces his purposes through their lives.

4. -Satan presides over this worlds systems promoting and employing his pawns to positions of power and influence.

Luke 4:5-7 - *And he led Him up and **SHOWED Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.** And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for **it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.** "Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"*

- If Satan's offer were phony then it wouldn't have been a temptation for Christ. The world systems really are held under his sway and he really does manipulate through people of influence who he places on stage. In addition to this behind the scenes look at societies puppet master we should note that he was attempting to persuade Jesus with visual media.
- Satan uses 'media' created by his subjects to communicate his lies and shape culture to his advantage.

Media Statistics

***TV**

- More than **70%** of children ages **8 to 18** have TVs in their bedrooms, according to the University of Michigan Health System. More than **35%** have cable or satellite-TV access.
- **49%** of SBA students have a TV in their bedroom.
- **Centers for Disease Control** – "*Television viewing is a major contributor to childhood obesity and can put your child at risk of developing type 2 diabetes and high-blood pressure later in life.*"
- According to one Surgeon General's report **61% of all TV programming contains violence.**
- **American Academy of Pediatrics** – "*a child who watches **3 to 4 hours** a day of non educational TV will see about **8,000 small-screen murders** by the time he or she completes grade school.*"

***MUSIC**

- According to **Edison Research's 'Share of Ear' study** most U.S. residents listen to roughly **4 hours and five minutes** of audio each day. Researchers found that listening to music activates not only the

auditory areas of the brain, but also employs large-scale neural networks. Unlike visual media, music is a powerful social force that also taps into an individual's personal identity, memories and mood.

- NY Times blog titled '**Under their Influence**' - *"Music is well-known to connect deeply with adolescents and to **influence identity development**, perhaps more than any other entertainment."*
- Hitler used extensive music programs to indoctrinate German youth with Nazi ideology/
- **Jimi Hendrix** - *"If there is something to be changed in this world, then it can only happen through music."* The music of the 60's ushered in a cultural revolution that rapidly began eradicating Christianity's influence in America.
- **Plato** - *"Music and rhythm find their way into the secret places of the soul"*, and what it does when it gets there depends upon who is communicating through it and the muse directing their art.
- An excellent resource to help pull back the curtain on secular music, movies, and novels can be found at: <http://www.goodfight.org/>

***VIDEO GAMES**

- **81%** of youth play at least once a month,
- **8.5%** of them are addicted and "the average **8- to 12** year-old now plays **13 hours of video games per week**, while the average **13- to 18** year old plays **14 hours of video games per week**"
- There may be positives to playing a limited amount of video games such as **improved hand eye coordination, fine motor skills**, and **spatial reasoning** but the negatives can include **obesity, social disconnection, violent tendencies, reduced attention spans** and more.

***INTERNET**

- **30%** of 3-5 year olds & **50%** of 6-9 year olds use the Internet daily. The Internet serves as a '**window to the world**'. It is the vehicle that brings every form of media available to your child's eyes and ears. Unfortunately it also brings other forms of evil that pose an even greater immediate threat to our children's well being.
- **53%** of **SBA** students say they can go online without their parent's knowledge.
- **44%** of **SBA** students say parents don't restrict the amount of time spent online.
- **36%** of **SBA** students say their parent's don't know what they do online.
- **41%** of **SBA** students say their parents aren't even asking what they are doing online.

***ONLINE DANGERS**

Cyber Bullying

- **43%** of teens have been victims of cyber bullying in the last year.
- Only **10%** of kids being bullied on-line will report it.
- Only **7%** of parents are concerned about cyber bullying

Sexual Predators

- At least **200 million** girls and **100 million** boys will be sexually victimized before they reach adulthood (*International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children*)
- In **82%** of online sex crimes against minors, the offender used the victim's social networking site to gain information about the victim's likes and dislikes.
- **65%** of online sex offenders used the victim's social networking site to gain home and school information about the victim (Journal of Adolescent Health 47, 2010)
- **33%** of **SBA** students say they have been contacted by a stranger online.
- **29%** of **SBA** students say they are talking to people online who their parents don't know.

Pornography

- Porn sites make up **12%** of the Internet. They are too prevalent to miss!
- **90%** of children ages **8-16** have viewed pornography.
- Average age of exposure to porn is **11**.
- The largest consumers of porn are **12-17 year old boys!**
- **55%** of girls have seen same sex intercourse.
- **83%** of boys have seen group sex.
- **50%** of **SBA** students admit to seeing inappropriate pictures or videos online.
- **57%** of **SBA** students say they have friends who have seen inappropriate pictures or videos online.

Developing Brains

- Research has shown that the human brain continues growing and maturing until the early or mid 20's. The brains of children, teens, and young adults, are wired for maximum absorption, but have not yet developed the areas that are optimized for higher-level understanding. Adult brains are optimized for understanding. While a teen is optimized for 'what', the adult brain is optimized for 'why'.
- The last part of the brain to fully develop is the area responsible for making 'good decisions'. We must train our kids to make wise decisions from godly motives but in reality they don't have the physiological capacity to consistently face down temptations until they are much older. This is why though we caution them to be slow careful drivers the majority of traffic accidents involve drivers who are under 25 years of age. They know the rules and have been warned of the dangers but are more likely to act carelessly than when they get older.
- While our controls will have to lesson as they grow older and head off to college they will still need to have accountability partners who will hold them accountable to godly standards. In the mean time it is up to us as parents to get serious about training them in righteousness!
- *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. **Proverbs 4:23*** Protecting our children requires that we become 'hands on parents' more than any other generation because we face challenges and threats greater than that of any subsequent generation. We must be the gatekeepers, as much as it is in our power, until they are old enough to consistently act in accordance with the biblical values we have taught and modeled before them.