

Revenge porn is ugly, but we need to discuss it

April 11 2016, By Daniel J. Bauer

No two words come even remotely close to “the kind of ugly,” we might say, that we find in the term “revenge porn.” The two words linked together are the verbal equivalent of the highest grade of coarse-grain sandpaper. And that is an incredibly mild metaphor for what we’re talking about.

“Revenge porn” deserves some sort of ribbon or award for its negative impact on me and, I suspect, all sensible, decent-minded people.

Obviously, there is the negative impact of the words in their individual meanings. For better or worse, people do as a matter of fact opt for revenge as a way to respond to persons or situations that have caused them pain. You may not agree with me that revenge is an inherently negative form of behavior. That is my view.

I believe that no good comes from revenge. And I mean nothing, a big fat zero.

I do not focus on the topic this week, but the question of renewed zeal in enforcing the death penalty, as an overly emotional and very regrettable result of the recent atrocity that took the life of a 4 year-old, is an example of a conscious choice to take revenge. (See last week’s effort here, “Taiwan in need of a lot of light on toddler murder,” CP 4-3-16, p. 4).

Understandable as the emotion or action may be in an individual, not necessarily a social instance, “revenge” so very often proves to be an unwise, short-sighted response. Revenge is the sort of thing that feels just terrific at the moment, and perfectly wrong, and asinine to boot, the very next day.

Join revenge with the concept of pornography, the making of intimate sexual behavior public in images for entertainment and some type of profit, and you see what I mean. “Revenge porn.” Whew, what a rancid pair of socks.

To strike at someone in an act of anger by exploiting their sexual vulnerability? How cheap can you be? How low can you go?

This awful topic hit the media this past week in the form of an update that the Taipei Women’s Rescue Foundation published on its Web site. The Foundation reports that 53 percent of the revenge porn victims who sought its assistance in the past 13 months said their nude images were leaked by “their current or

former partners” (TT 4-1-16, p. 5). All the victims, by the way, were female.

Seventy-two percent of the victims were women between the ages of 21 and 35. One was only 12 when the incident occurred. The Foundation says - - and this we should discuss with our student population - - that over 70 percent of the spreaders of revenge porn were within the social circle of the victims.

Say that again, please? The people who share revenge porn, according to statistics, tend to be friends or former friends of the very people they are assaulting.

The question of culpability is sensitive on this topic. The Foundation says 61% of the images were obtained illegally. About half, however, were taken by mutual consent in the beginning, or were selfies the victims themselves took, and sent out.

Ex-partners sent one of every four of the revenge porn images as a form of “punishment” for breaking up with them. About 16% of these failed Romeos (no nice guys, they) released the images to pressure their former romantic others to resume the relationship.

When I began teaching ethics at my university, colleagues reacted with surprise when I said at a workshop that I devote two weeks of my course to “friendship ethics.” A news event like this about the Foundation’s findings on revenge porn is a perfect fit for a conversation about just that, friendship ethics. What is right and what is sometimes wrong about my behavior in relationships, be they ordinary or romantic? In addition, what are the reasons for my “right” and my “wrong”?

The findings of the Foundation show we’ve miles to go in educating our sons and male students about the meaning of basic decency. Guys who are worth their salt never pressure a romantic partner. Girls and women deserve the same dignity and freedom for their decisions that we want for ourselves.

We obviously have much to do with our daughters and female students, too. Readers of the feminine gender, please, now: think 100 times before snapping some types of pictures, or don’t snap at all.

Think 10,000 times before you post or send a picture that you consider kind of interesting. (*Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.*)

Talking points

- 1) People reported 269 cases of "revenge porn" to authorities last year in Taiwan. Not to embarrass you, but are you aware of people who have been victims of this type of sexual assault? How much do you know about revenge porn?
- 2) The writer here argues that parents and teachers share in the responsibility to talk with girls and boys early in life about revenge porn. Are parents in Taiwan willing to do this? Are teachers?
- 3) If possible, share an experience you've had with looking at pictures, perhaps very innocent ones, but of a sexual nature, on Facebook or elsewhere. How do sexy pictures make you feel?

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