

# Socio-cultural influences on sexuality

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" Sexuality is an important part of our lives"(King, 2012, p. 1), and a reoccurring theme throughout our development. The role that sexuality plays in each of our lives is so important that we see its influence through multiple sources in life, including media and socialculture. No matter where you look in society some sort of sexuality is present; whether walking in the mall, observing thefamilylife, or watching teens socialize. What is it though that makes a sexually relationship healthy? Is it attraction, intimacy, love, or interactions with each other? Through this paper we will discuss all the aspects of socio-cultural influences on sexuality, as well as the healthy relationship.

It was Rathus (1993) who told us " human sexuality is the way in which we experience and express ourselves as sexual beings." It only makes sense that through ourenvironmentwe learn what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior, even when talking about sex. History is flourished with studies on the affects of sexual experiences, and cultural influences. It was Freud who taught us that we begin our exploration of sex at an early age through psuedosexual stages (Rana, 1977).

His second essay on Infantile Sexuality discussed the earlychildhoodstages and perversions that affect all.(Rana, 1977) During this controversial time it is the parents who show young children how to act. Therefore, in a family that hugs and touches each other lovingly we should expect to see the children to do so as well. Children are known for mimicking or " parroting " behavior in which they attempt to learn the societal norms. With this as the basis of a child's development as a sexual being they should be off to a good start.

## Media Motivators and Sexual Education

Unfortunately, parents are not the only influence on a child's development in sexuality. From magazine articles to movies we are surrounded by relationships, some are healthy and some are not. Sex... it sells! Or so the media likes to tell us. They post beautiful women half naked on every magazine ad, television show, or movie; but it is not just the men who are targeted by such ads. Young girls want to be these women, because they are popular and what society tells us is beautiful.

The headlines associated with these beautiful photos read " How to Make Him Want More Sex"" , " How to Make Him Orgasm"" , and lets not forget " A Newer, Sexier You for the New Year". Is this really how we want our children to learn about sex? Unfortunately, within American culture we see girls younger and younger having children, indicating sexual behavior before marriage. From these indications it is clear that media has the primary influence of sexual culture.

Schools offer sexual education often at the young age of middle school in order to assist parents with this large task to right media's wrongs. Although schools focus their education on abstinence rather the safe sex and sexual diseases, some education is better than none or so they tell us. Smith et al. (2003, para 4) results showed that children's knowledge of sexual risks was low, especially in areas of vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. A sexual risk that controversially has received no attention is the psychological risk that sex can have on one. Without a healthy relationship a person often is left with guilty feelings, regret, and low

self worth. This is definitely not the message portrayed through magazine articles.

According to Okazaki (Feb. 2002, para 1), the Asian American population is not influenced highly by media motivators. Through her study of this ethnic group she found that because the Asian American population is characterized primarily through their cultural characteristics based on family, collective goals of individual wishes, emphasis on propriety and social codes; sex is reserved for marriage. Through their influences based on modesty there is an exceptional difference in premarital sex. However, her results also show that the more the Asian American culture comes acclimated to our society the more sexual behavior they exhibit.

### Sexual Gender Theories and Gender Roles

Many of the sexual influenced are biased toward gender roles, a set of culturally specific norms concerning expected behaviors and attitudes based on sexual identity of male or female (King, 2012, p. 198). As Okazaki pointed out, in Asian American culture it is still viewed as acceptable for those of the male gender to experiment sexually before marriage, but females are considered delicate flowers not allowed to completely bloomed until matched in a marital pair (2002, para 2). Within the American culture our roles have relaxed some to allow females to experiment, but not until they are a ripe legal age. We allow our men to experiment early through touch (masturbation) and view it as acceptable, yet when little girls play with their bodies it nearly devastates us. Through our harsh reactions we teach the young to feel guilty and wrong about sexual explorations.

Many gender roles of our time allow women to work and seek education before or during their motherhood years; changes from our earlier history of the American women. Although a woman may take on these "extracurricular activities" they are still expected to carry on the traditional chores of housework and child rearing. Men have less responsibility to be the primary breadwinner, yet this is traditionally still their main societal focus. Smith et al. (2003, para 4) research transcripts also put light to the different sexual roles for males and females. It showed females should be more culturally restrained, and males as less abstinent. Both sexes adolescents had strong views towards family importance in the influence of sexual behavior, something congruent across cultural barriers.

Part of these gender roles associated with sex pertains to the two gender theories. The first gender theory is that of the sociocultural theory in which the differences are based on the culture in which they are raised; something that we discussed throughout the previous paragraphs. The evolutionary role puts the behavioral difference based on the pressures each sex deals with daily. For women it is that sex is for reproduction, so they seek out the optimal mate in which to love and settle down with.

For men it is the attraction, risk taking, and competitiveness that draw them towards multiple mates. In this theory we see more of a discussion on the relationship view of sex, in which we discuss love, attraction, and intimacy. Young women are given pretty pictures of love associated with sex and happy ever after; however, as adults through experience we learn this is not the truth. Healthy relationships are those in which we can say at the end of

the day that all experiences including sexual ones are positive (King, 2012, p. 298), this should be the thought we teach our adolescents.

### Sexual Dysfunction and Commercialized Sex

Wilhelm Reich (Demeo, 1998, para 2) believed and proved that emotions and sexuality were directly related, and that there was energy in the libido. His work proved not only that the energy existed but also that sexual dysfunction was a product of emotional detachment due to traumatic event in ones life. Essentially Reich was able to correlate how emotions could play into ones sexual disorder and relate that to sexual crimes. He brought the study of sexual humanity to light, and sought to assist in curing those with sexual ailments.

These were important advancements in the study of socio-cultural influences on sexuality as they began to show how our upbringing could negatively affect our sexual views and society. Over time our society has set to life rules and laws against sexually lude behavior, in which we could negatively influence the young. Some of these laws involved diminishing prostitution, limiting access to pornographic materials, and eliminate sex trafficking.

From what we do, so shall our children do (author unknown). It is evident that adolescents seek to mimic the actions they see as popular. Movies, television, and magazines teach us to go forth into sexual exploration, and not to worry. The truth is a different story, and so our society must realize the need for change. We must foster education, modesty, and healthy sexual relationships in order to teach younger generations the impact of sexual interactions. We have the option as a society full of culture to choose

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whether we want generations of sexual dysfunction and violence, or love and sex.