

# Sex and the youth essay



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Adolescence is a phase in one's life where an individual undergoes the process of growing up, which involves the occurrence of changes in various aspects of life. At this point, the whole process becomes confusing and uncomfortable to the person involved. Like any other stages in life, adolescence is also molded by the concept of socio-culturalism.

More often than not, the skills, choices, and settings that the youth engage in during their adolescent years are prescribed by the social institutions they belong to and are done in accordance to the expectations of others as a requirement for their success in adulthood (Crockett qtd. n Crockett and Silbereisen 1). However, it is worthy to note that adolescent development is not only based on the expectations and the adherence of the youth to their social institutions. Social changes also play a significant role in shaping the beliefs and development of adolescents. Social change is said to be the large-scale alteration of different systems in the society such as technological, ideological, and economic system, which could promote various implications in the lives of individuals. In the case of adolescents, social change can "affect the structure and dynamics of social context that adolescents experience in a daily basis such as family, school and youth groups.

It can also alter the social institutions and cultural belief system that organize the adolescent period" (Crockett and Silbereisen 1). Social changes may be derived from various origins. There are some instances that the occurrence of such change is rooted from historical events that eventually alter and implicate the development of young adults. One form of social

change that directly altered the perception of adolescents toward sexuality is the rise of sexual revolution.

The sexual Revolution Back in 1950's and early 1960's, sex was considered as a private matter, and just like childbearing, it was viewed as an activity carried out within marriage. Majority of females back in the said era are careful with their behaviors so that they will not have a loose reputation that may cost them their marriage with a respectable man. While it is true that in 1958, about four out of ten adolescent females have already engaged in premarital sex, it has been in a strict sense that premarital sex is merely “premarital,” which means it does occur within the relationship that is about to progress into marriage. This data is an indication that for most women during that period, premarital sex is part of the “engagement” and is done with a man whom the woman is about to marry, and the action is initiated within a short period before the wedding (Kinsey et. al, qtd.

n Albers 16). By 1969, it was reported that almost 70% of Americans view sex before marriage as wrong; three out of four people perceived nude photos in magazine as objectionable, and four out of five agreed that shows containing nudity were not acceptable. Years later however, the said values declined. Several researches and polls indicated that the perception of the public towards premarital sex has rapidly changed. In the later parts of the 1960's, more and more people have already engaged in premarital sex (Albers). As more and more people are openly accepting the notion of premarital sex, the claim for sexual activity to be limited for adults became difficult.

The dilemma started when questions such as “ by what logic could sex be declared taboo for the young? ” or “ how young was too young? ” The advocates of premarital sex used these questions to challenge the rules about sex permeating during that period—that sex is only for married people, and that sex between unmarried couples is justifiable as long as they are about to get married and they are close enough in attaining “ legal adulthood. Minors who are not mature in the public eye or are not close to reaching adulthood cannot obtain contraception. In this sense, minors are those individuals below the age of 21 years old. These questions of the advocates paved way for the recognition of the rights of teenagers to use contraception, which eventually meant the right to have sex. Although the sexual revolution was intended to become a “ revolution for the adults,” the late 1960’s and early parts of 70’s witnessed the changes in the patterns of sexual behavior of everyone, including the teenagers (Albers 17).

With the advent of sexual revolution in the 1960’s, premarital sex became a social norm which promised equality for women and free love for everyone, including the teens. In this sense, the sexual revolution spearheaded a trend that became a benchmark in other aspects of adolescent life, such as the increased emphasis on peer groups, the promotion of sexual education in schools, the media’s portrayal of sex, and other social factors that continuously shape the unwarranted perception of teenagers towards sex as a right and an acceptable norm. According to Dr. Ira Reis, sociology professor at the University of Minnesota, the lax behavior of teenagers today regarding sexuality is not a rebellion. She even noted that the teens of today are “

finishing what was started in the 60's and moving toward a wider, legitimate sphere of sexual choice" (Reis qtd. in Williams).

More importantly, while the new philosophy concerning sexuality is not yet present, young people still consider engaging in sexual activity as a personal right under certain circumstances. There is a common belief for the young individuals that such feelings toward sex are clear, which is not understood by their parents (Reis qtd. n Williams). Current Adolescent Sexual Trend Current statistics on teen sexuality in the United States is alarming.

According to statistics, almost half of the 15-19 year old American population has had engaged in sexual activities. It was also indicated that by the age of 17, majority of young people had their first sex experience.

However, they do not marry until the middle or later parts of their 20's. Hence, this is an indication that young adult females are at a higher risk of getting pregnant and that both male and female adolescents are susceptible to sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Although engaging in sexual activities is said to be rare among young teens, it was found out that by the time that they reach the later parts of their teenage years, having sex becomes more common (Guttmacher Institute). These statistics do not fully capture the extent of the changes that teenagers undergo, most especially in terms of their social behaviors. Although there is a general idea that more and more teens are getting involved in " premarital sex," there is no common understanding of how this group of young people views " premarital sex. While there is a notion during the 1950's that the involvement of women in premarital sex is an indication of their willingness to get married, the

teenagers at present are sexually active and are very much willing to engage in sexual activities whether or not they have the plans to tie the knot.

There are no solid reasons why American teenagers of today are retreating from marriage. Although teenagers today do engage in sex and child bearing which is parallel with those of the teenagers in 1950's, the vast difference lies in the notion that teenagers are engaging in sex without the benefit of wedlock (Albers). Antecedents of Teen Sex Peer Pressure One result of the advent of sexual revolution is the change in the perception of people towards sex, including the youth. The consequences of such social change are not limited in the context of accepting premarital sex as a legitimate activity for adults; sexual revolution also directly impacted the teenagers in terms of expanding their social relationships and regarding sex as a representation of independence. In a greater sense, the role of peers cannot be disregarded in the introduction of teenagers in sex and their changing sexual behaviors.

It is believed that most of the adolescents today are expanding their social life ranges. Along with such expansion is their involvement in complexities wherein they are geared towards doing things that they think represent who they really are. Due to their engagement in various activities, there is an increased awareness in the teenagers' social surroundings, and peers play a substantial role in the lives of the young adults. During the adolescent stage, peers become the center of the teenagers' lifestyle. Majority of the things that they do are affected by the peers that surround them.

This is due in part with the idea that peers are the avenue for teenager to freely express themselves. It was also taken into account that the social

activities that adolescents participate in together with their peers could affect the decision that they make and the interest that they have in engaging in sexual relationships (Berndt; Hartup qtd. in Jackson & Rodriguez-Tome). Several studies indicate that a teenager's direct involvement in peer social influence could result in his or her engagement in sex and a change in sexual behavior (Kinsman, et.

al; Ary et. l; Bea et al. ; Wilder and Watt qtd in Essau). There is a clear indication that when a person's peers are sexually active and has a lax view regarding the said activity, it is most likely that the person's own sexual behavior will become predictive a year later (L'Engle et al. , qtd in Essau).

In addition, it was also discovered that the association of a teenager with deviant peers paves way for the young adult to adopt the values of the group that he or she participates in and is more likely to practice with the group behaviors that the teenagers frequently see. Such behaviors may include entry in the workforce, poor school performance, sexual behaviors, and other adult works (Ary; Wilder and Watt; Silver and Bauman qtd. in Essau). Hence, an adolescent who believes that his or her same-sex peers are sexually experienced and the liberal approach of the said peers towards sex is a solid indicator that the teenager is more likely to engage in the same activity. Thus, it was contemplated that majority of teenagers today actually engage in the activities that their friends adhere to regardless of whether it is correct or not (Newcomer et al. qtd.

in Hayes and Hofferth). There were findings that show white male teenagers are more likely to choose peers on the basis of sexual activities that were

carried out by the individuals (Billy and Udry qtd. in Hayes and Hofferth) while female adolescents could be persuaded by their peers to engage in the activity to some extent based on their knowledge that her female friends are engaging the same activity as well. However, there was a clear indication that adolescent females' involvement in sexual activities is strongly influenced by their close male friends or sexual partners (Miller and Simon; Herold; Cvetkovich and Grote; Billy and Udry qtd.

n Hayes and Hofferth). Another study noted that among adolescents' ages 10 to 14; sexual involvement is initiated through dares and challenges which involve fondling, kissing, and even sexual intercourse. The said activity is prevalent among girls (Lewis and Lewis qtd. in Hayes and Hofferth).

In general, it was discovered that white girls are at higher risk of sexual involvement because they are prone to adhering to the pressure exerted by their friends (Hayes and Hofferth). In this perspective, it is a clear indication that the idea promoted by sexual revolution in 1960's is far reaching and has and is continuously influencing different aspects in the lives of teenagers. It is evident that the notion of freedom attached to sex shapes how teenagers practice their social life and peer selection. The apparent pressure from friends has a strong impact on teenagers. Many studies show that teenagers consider social pressure as the chief reason why majority of the teenage population are having sexual intercourse at a young age. Both boys and girls stated that they are pressured by their peers to further do the act than they wanted to.



Along with peer pressure, the notion “ nobody cares anymore if you are a virgin or not” is a primary reason why teens are more likely to engage in sexual behavior (Williams). The Role of Parents in the Initiation of Teen Sex Today, parents themselves are unsettled by the permeating sexual environment brought about by the sexual revolution. Several public opinion polls suggest that parents have complex ways of dealing with teen sex. Most parents agree that teenagers should not engage in sexual activities. They are imposing the more traditional ways of morality among their children.

Yet, it was also indicated that the same parents agreed that sexually active teenagers should have access to information regarding birth control and contraceptives. Likewise, parents also favor incorporating sexual education in school curriculums, but they are worried that such education may further imbibe the idea that premarital sex is acceptable. Furthermore, while many claim disapproval of unmarried teenage mothers, majority of parents are in favor of laws that require parents’ approval before doing an abortion. Thus, evidently, there is a contradiction in the outlook of parents toward teen sex, which makes it more difficult to establish the message that parents want to convey to their children. Due to these contradicting views, teenagers are having trouble with what is morally upright and not.

Hence, teenagers are more tempted to have sexual freedom because there is no proper consensus of what should and should not be done (Albers).

There were also studies presenting that the direct involvement of parents in risky behaviors serve as a catalyst for teenagers to engage in the same risky activity. One Mr. Welsh from a Virginia school who interviewed many students for his book “ Tales Out of School” stated that in many homes,

teenagers have firsthand accounts of adult hypocrisy. In one of his interviews he quoted: " One girl told me that her mom had a date Friday night and he's in the kitchen eating breakfast Saturday morning, how can she preach about premarital sex? " (Welsh qtd. in Williams).

Moreover, recent studies also suggest that children whose parents engage in activities like smoking, drinking, and other risky behaviors are more likely to do the same thing, and that the said children are more likely to become sexually active even before they reach 15 years old. Furthermore, there were also studies indicating that greater sexual involvement can be observed among 14 to 17 year-olds who are living with a single parent (Silver and Baumann qtd. in Essau). Such action is attributed to the lack of monitoring from parents or a result of family conflict. The teens' adherence to such form of deviant behavior is a result of (1) directly carrying out the deviant behavior as seen from the parents, (2) a form of exploration of new behaviors due to the tolerance of their parents towards unwanted behavior, (3) an escape or a reaction to a family conflict, and (4) acknowledging symbolic relations related to adulthood such as sexual intercourse (Ary et al. ,; Blum et al. ; Sussman and Ames; Wilder and Watt qtd. in Essau). The said changes in the behavior of the parents towards sex contribute to the augmenting issue of teen sex.

Although parents try to impose traditional morality, if there are inconsistencies with their actions and what they preach, it would be difficult to change the sexual perception of teenagers. Today, sexuality is no longer an issue that can be kept behind closed doors (Burr qtd. in Williams). Sex

Education, Abortion, and Contraceptives The reflection of sexual revolution is also seen in the access to programs and services that will prevent the problems associated with sexual activity such as AIDS, STIs, and pregnancy.

The incorporation of sex education in school curriculum and the growing popularity of contraceptives and abortion were seen as a solution to the problems concerning sexual activity. Generally, Americans are currently much liberal on the availability of birth control information, provisions concerning contraceptive use, and the access to abortion than any nation in the world. Majority of the American public also supports sex education because it is thought to provide knowledge and skills that can help shape the rightful sexual behavior (Albers). Hence, more and more teens recognize sex as something that could be done without worries because there are preventive measures that could be taken in order to reduce the problems associated with engagement in sexual activities. However, despite the “openness” of Americans toward sexual education, contraceptives, and abortions, the United States rate of abortion, pregnancy, and childbearing is relatively higher compared to other industrialized nations.

Such disparities are attributed to the lack of coherence in the national policy and contraception. Likewise, it was noted that despite the increased attention on sex education, lessons regarding sex are hard for young people to absorb which further contribute to the augmenting issue of teen pregnancy and abortion (Williams). Sexual Portrayals in Mass Media Shortly right after the advent of sexual revolution, almost all the aspects of the American society followed the trend which the said change had set. Mass media is one of the most powerful aspects in the society that further give

emphasis on sexual freedom. Today, with the existence of numerous forms of mass media, teenagers are bombarded with programs that promote sexuality.

As a result, majority of teenagers are now confronted with conflicting messages, mores, and impulses that greatly affect their decision to engage in sexual activities. According to studies, the portrayal of mass media towards sexuality influences the sexual behavior of teenagers. A comprehensive review indicates that the media's portrayal of sex is depicted as risk-free and glamorous. Consequently, this influences the behavior of teenagers through the social modeling effects (Brown and Witherspoon qtd. in Essau). Many media products also depict youth as a willing participant in sexual and other risky behaviors.

Hence, such concept indicates that the youth who practice sexual freedom are more honest, independent, and courageous compared to their counterparts (Sussman qtd. in Essau). In addition, music such as rock and roll strongly depicts sexual related scenarios, romantic emotions, and sexual lyrics which may become the perpetrators of sexual behaviors among teens (Martino et al. qtd.

in Essau). Many critics suggested that the media contains too much sexually suggestive content, which becomes a ground for teenagers to have an illustration of provocative behavior (Gunter; Humez qtd. in Turner). Likewise, media characters in soap operas, "chick flicks," and sitcoms as well as MTV videos serve as a role model for teenagers to imitate without them realizing that they are doing so (Turner). Along with television, radio, magazines, and

other forms of traditional media, teenagers today have a different way of establishing contact with their peers and other people through cell phones, palm pilots, and most especially the internet. Through the rise of different and much advanced technological devices, the behaviors of teenagers are further shaped.

Teenagers are now drawn with chat rooms where they sometimes develop cyberspace relationships. Likewise, because access to internet is far reaching, visitation to pornographic websites is also common among the youth (Turner). Hence, the exposure of teenagers to internet pornography as well as to music with explicit lyrics is viewed as a major introduction to sexual materials that could later on catapult the modeling effects—meaning, the actions seen in pornographic sites or explicit lyrics can be applied by teenagers in reality and can provide the youth an outlet to express, themselves most especially teenagers who are “sensation-seeking” (Ybarra and Mitchell; Martino et al. qtd.

in Essau). With the continuous portrayal of sex as a risk-free activity by the media, teenagers are further exposed to the said depiction, and it is more likely that the rates of the engagement of teenagers in sex and the rates of teen pregnancy is more likely to get lower overtime. Conclusion Apparently, the sexual revolution of the 1960's played a significant role in the shift of perception of the American public toward sex. Although the said revolution was intended to be done in order to promote equality for women, such revolution became a ground for a radical change that did not only impact the adults but most especially the youth of today.

This form of social change does not only operate in a single level; rather, it promotes alteration in a national scale. Evidently, the advent of sexual revolution impacted various aspect of the society, resulting in the total liberation and legitimization of sex. Thus, teenagers, just like the adults, are calling their shots to practice such form of “ freedom. ” Along with its national recognition is the trend it had left that continued to permeate and take over the American society. Thus, myriads of issues are now being faced by the society concerning the changes brought about by sexual revolution in the sexual behaviors of teenagers.

Sexual revolution as a mechanism of social change produced positive and negative results. For one, with its advocacy came the idea of women empowerment and gender equality. However, the negative results of the said social change outweigh the positive ends it has presented. Its drawbacks are evidently seen in the lax outlook of teenagers towards sexuality. Today, more and more teenagers are adhering to the idea set by the sexual revolution. With this lax behavior toward sex come the problems of teen pregnancy, abortion, and the spread of sexually transmitted disease.

However, this change of attitude by the youth today should not be attributed to them alone; parents, the media, and the society should also take part in the growing awareness of teenagers toward sex as a social norm. In this manner, the teenagers’ desire to distinguish themselves is not only a personal choice, but rather a pattern set about by their predecessors. Thus, there should be a general understanding and thorough communication about sex. Sex education and contraception are not enough to educate teenagers about sexuality; there should be stronger programs in the promotion of

abstinence which is not strongly incorporated within the whole system of the society. Based on the data drawn from the study, it is suggested that further analysis on the study should be taken into consideration in order to address some issues that were not covered.

Likewise, more analysis concerning social change should be done in order to develop effective solutions in some of the issues concerning the altered perception of youth toward sexuality.