

# Sex and the media: art copying life or vice versa



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In today's society, the act of having sex with an individual seems to have found acceptance in the mainstream of societal thought. In essence, what we are saying is that fornication, or engaging in sexual acts with a person not one's spouse, is not frowned upon these days. But do the producers of these television shows and movies not realize that what they present on the tube is affecting the conduct and lives of their primary market, the teenage sector? And do the movie outfits churning out these movies have inklings on their potential effects on their audiences? It is being argued that the American media industry has become the best teacher when it comes to topics about the sexual act (Victor Strasburger, 2005).

As the children reach the adolescent stage in their lives, the teenagers then would have viewed a significant amount of materials with regards to sex and sexuality as seen on the media forms (Strasburger, 2005). The instances of promiscuous sexual conduct is not only limited to the available scenes that are constantly bombarding teenagers on the television and the silver screen (Strasburger, 2005). The Internet also provides a ready source of fornication in media (Strasburger, 2005). On the average, a child watching television will be exposed to 15, 000 sexual scenes or insinuations (Strasburger, 2005).

This is most disturbing as the large number of teenagers inclined shows in the United States is loaded with sexual overtones (Strasburger, 2005). What is rampant in the shows is the improper conduct of sexual activity among teenagers (Strasburger, 2005). But what these shows also have is a dearth on the proper sexual conduct, healthy self-awareness and issues like teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases acquisition and prevention (Strasburger, 2005). In a survey done on approximately 1, 700

teenagers, a steady stream of sex on the television will induce teenagers to engage in the sexual act sooner than what is expected (Marilyn Elias, 2004). According to psychologist Rebecca Collins of the Rand Corporation, even if the explicit sexual act is not viewed on the television, Internet, or the silver screen, the mere mention of sexual language on the media form is as detrimental as the viewing of the sexual act itself (Elias, 2004).

This study also bore out the fact that teenagers or even children who are more exposed to sex on the media forms at the onset of the year will likely engage in sexual acts in the coming year (Elias, 2004). This also took into consideration the children who did not watch sexually explicit or implicit behavior in the television, Internet, or movies (Elias, 2004). According to Collins, those children in the upper percentile of those exposed to sexually loaded television or movies are more likely to have sexual intercourse than those in the lower percentile ranges (Elias, 2004). In essence, the greater the amount of sexual scenes teenagers are exposed to, the greater chance that they will try the act themselves (Elias, 2004). But the findings of explicit sex on television having an effect on teenager's chances of having sex is being opposed in some quarters (Elias, 2004).

According to some analysts, the sex scenes in the media will have an effect on the teenagers if they want to be sexually active themselves (Elias, 2004). According to some, teenagers that would engage in sexual activity is not totally anchored on the prevalence of sex in the media that these individuals are exposed to (Elias, 2004). If the former study took into account the teenagers' readiness to engage in sexual activity, then the study would have tarnished findings since they did not take this factor into consideration (Elias, <https://assignbuster.com/sex-and-the-media-art-copying-life-or-vice-versa/>

2004). Another factor that should have been taken into consideration is the physical condition of the teen (Elias, 2004).

Some teenagers who are constituted more differently than some would feel the need and the readiness to engage in sexual activity (Elias, 2004). But in some recent surveys, the prevalence of sex on the media seems to have a resounding effect on the drive of teenagers to engage in sexual activity (The Henry L. Kaiser, 2002 Foundation, 2002). It is different when people who are detached from the problem speak about the issue; it is another thing when the observations are coming from their own peers. In a study done on some teenagers, they believe that the prevalence of sex on television and the media affects the outlook of their peers in regard to the sexual act and sexuality (Kaiser, 2002).

Nearly three out of four teens, roughly 72 percent of the respondents believe that sex does have an influence on the behavior of children in their age group (Kaiser, 2002). But there are studies coming out that even teenagers disagree that the media has a significant impact on them (Strasburger, 2005). Like the assumption of many adults, they believe that the impact of television will not have any bearing on their dispositions and outlooks in life (Strasburger, 2005). This is called the “third-person” effect (Strasburger, 2005).

In a survey conducted on 500 teenagers, 75 percent of the respondents did believe that the media did influence their peer’s behavior (Strasburger, 2005). But in the same study, less than 25 percent of the respondents believe that the media had an impact on themselves (Strasburger, 2005).

Although the rates vary, teenagers who aver that sex on the television, Internet and the silver screen influence their peers' outlook on sex in moderate terms, averaging around 40 percent (Kaiser, 2002). Some even aver the sex in the media affects their peers in a significant way, averaging 32 percent of the respondents (Kaiser, 2002). But the issue is not centered alone on the effects of sex in the media on children alone. The deleterious or negative effects of sex in the media can be dangerous to young children as well (Christina Grant, 2003).

The constant deluge of sex in the media comes at a point in the teenagers' life that they are slowly building foundations in their value systems (Grant, 2003). There is also the factor that the teenagers do not have the sufficient skills and mechanisms at their disposal for the effective filtering and recognition of the messages that come through the various media forms (Grant, 2003). It is estimated that the typical American teenager roughly consumes about three to four hours of television time (Grant, 2003). In some cases, the time spent in front of the television surpasses that of being spent inside the school or school activities (Grant, 2003). In a study conducted by the Kaiser, 2002 Family Institute, it was sought to determine the frequency and the content of messages in the television during what American television industries call the " Family hour" (Grant, 2003). In that span of time, where " Wholesome" family entertainment is supposed to be the television fare, the research group determined that the instances of sexual orientation averaged about 8.

5 times in that hour (Grant, 2003). The statistics are for 1996; in 1976, there were only 2. 3 instances of sexual insinuations and acts, or a jump of roughly <https://assignbuster.com/sex-and-the-media-art-copying-life-or-vice-versa/>

270 percent (Grant, 2003). Is the issue of sex in the media confined to the seeming moral ground of discussion? Apparently, the issue at hand would garner a resounding no, meaning that aside from the moral dilemma that the issue is generating for sexual intercourse between teenagers, there is also a medical threat to these teenagers. It is stated that the instances of teenagers having sexual contact at their early stage of life poses a severe threat on the health of these people (Eileen Hart). According to the American Association of Pediatrics (AAP), the threat of teenagers having sex at this stage in their lives comes with a myriad of consequences (Hart).

Inclusive of the dangers that teenagers are prone to in engaging in sexual activity are increasing rates of teenagers getting pregnant and the possibility that the teenager will contract some form of sexually transmitted disease (Hart). Annually, there is at least one out of four teenagers who are sexually active that acquire sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) (Hart). Many aver that the younger the girl in the arrangement experiences sexual contact; she will have sex forced upon her (Hart). In the health field, the instances of sexually laden messages coming through the homes of teenagers are ones that espouse that there are no ill effects if teenagers or the performers in media if they engage in wanton and promiscuous activity (Hart). The message that can be deduced in the data is that the sexual activity of people in the media connotes the seeming acceptability of society in the fornication aspect of sex (Hart).

As stated earlier, the mention of sexual activity or insinuation in the media is not accompanied with the messages of safe or even abstinence from sexual activity until the proper time (Hart). Although the parents and health officials

are trying to push for education on safe sex and the use of condoms, the media message has been deficient in that regard (Hart). It is regarded that both sides of the media issue, the advertising influence of the sex in the media issue is impacting the lives of teenagers, according to the stand of the pediatrics association that is supporting the call for responsible sexual awareness programs in media (Hart). Aside from the physical harm that teenagers open themselves to in engaging in sexual activity, the influence of the media may also endanger the psychological make up of the teen (Hart).

In the connotation of the media, a certain body structure is being peddled as to say that this type is most acceptable to society other than their possible and current physical structure (Hart). That message has the potential of harming the self-esteem of any teenager (Hart). Teenagers, especially the females in the sector, gain discontentment over the particular type of appealing physical body being peddled in the media (Hart). These in turn instigate within the females to turn to health risk diets in order to conform to the standard being set by the media (Hart).

In the act of having sex at their age, several risks are always bound to crop up in the course of this action (Hart). In conservative estimates, it was determined that about half of teenagers are engaging in a sexually active lifestyle (Grant, 2003). But of that number, it is estimated that only a third of those in this lifestyle utilizes some form of protection in their consummation of the sex act (Grant, 2003). Across the border in Canada, it is estimated that 45, 000 teenagers get pregnant annually (Grant, 2003).

Over the past decade, the rates of teenagers getting pregnant has dramatically risen (Grant, 2003). But in comparison to the United States, the rate of teen pregnancy in Canada is still very much lower (Grant, 2003). As discussed earlier, the threat of acquiring sexually transmittable diseases are still a major health problem related to the sexual promiscuity of teenagers (Grant, 2003). In Canada, the teenagers in their country, particularly females, have the highest rates of Chlamydia and gonorrhea if compared to other age demographics (Grant, 2003). Also, it was reported that the occurrence of HIV cases in the industrialized world was most prevalent in the youth sector (Grant, 2003). It is already asserted the high importance of the role of the media in the lives of teenagers and children (Strasburger, 2005).

But how important is the influence of media in practical terms in the lives of the youth? In many research studies, it has been determined that the media poses the most unnoticed but wielding great importance in the upbringing and outlook of teenagers and young people (Strasburger, 2005). Once the children mature into their senior years, these children would have spent approximately 7 to 10n years of their existence facing the television without incorporating times for watching movies or the Internet (Strasburger, 2005). Currently, the typical American child consumes about 5.5 hours daily watching the television and other media forms (Strasburger, 2005).

That statistic would mean that the average American teenager and youth would have less time for other activities not associated with media (Strasburger, 2005). Other activities, such as reading, playing, having a social life is crowded out of the everyday life of the child and the teenager (Strasburger, 2005). This would also mean that the teenager is getting adept



with multi-tasking with different media forms (Strasburger, 2005). That means that teenagers are watching television, using the computer, and using their cell phones either one at a time or simultaneously (Strasburger, 2005). The power that the media wields in shaping the behavior of the children and teenagers cannot be underestimated. In one study conducted on 75 pregnant teenagers, it was found out that about 50 percent of the pregnant teenagers were in the habit of watching soap operas before they became pregnant (Grant, 2003).

It was also gathered from the respondents that in their belief, their characters would not use birth control means (Grant, 2003). In another research study, 391 teenagers were taken as respondents (Grant, 2003). In the course of the study, it was evidenced that those teenagers that viewed programs on television saturated in sexual insinuations were more likely to engage in fornication sex (Grant, 2003). In the data released by the National Surveys of Children in the United States, it was gathered that male teenagers and children exposed to a higher degree of television programming were more prone to having sexual intercourse (Grant, 2003). Also, boys who watched television alone were more susceptible in engaging in sexual intercourse rather than those who watched television with their families (Grant, 2003).

It is here that the role of the media in the issue of sex and sexual activity is put to the fore (Grant, 2003). Simply put, if teenagers and children can be subjected to messages that teach them on the "wrong" ways about sex, then it should be also an instrument in the correct teaching of values about sex (Grant, 2003). Many teenagers aver that the media has given them

positive inputs on the subject of sex and the media (Kaiser, 2002). instances on refusing to have sex and how to react to such situations that are putting them in stressful and compromising position (Kaiser, 2002). That factor reached 60 percent of the respondents in the survey (Kaiser, 2002). Also, the sex issue on television allows the parents and the adolescent to communicate on issues with regard to the sex issue on the television (Kaiser, 2002).

The media can be a very useful instrument in disseminating information to teenagers with regard to the sex issue (Strasburger, 2005). This is because of the situation in the schools and the homes of the teenagers themselves (Strasburger, 2005). This is because there is a seeming hesitation in these institutions to thoroughly engage the teenagers in the subject of sex and sexuality (Strasburger, 2005). In a research study conducted in 2004, about 500 teenagers were engaged as respondents (Strasburger, 2005). They were asked on the influence of media in the teaching of sex as compared to their parents or their teachers at school (Strasburger, 2005). In the survey, it was found out the parents and the schools were severely outranked if compared to the influence of media in teaching them about birth control issues (Strasburger, 2005).

In another parallel survey, about 500 parents were also conducted in the issue of teaching about sex and other related issues (Strasburger, 2005). In the results of the study, it was found out that the students' parents, about half of the parents of students in the seventh and eighth grades, did not make any effort to discuss sexually-related issues such as sexuality and birth control (Strasburger, 2005). The same survey of parents of teenagers in high <https://assignbuster.com/sex-and-the-media-art-copying-life-or-vice-versa/>

school showed that they also did not talk to their children about birth control and other issues (Strasburger, 2005). The school officials did not fare any better in their efforts to communicate with their students about sex and other related issues (Strasburger, 2005). In a parallel survey this time conducted on principals, they were deficient in teaching their students about the issue of birth control (Strasburger, 2005). In the survey, it was determined that one out of every ten schools in the United States did not have a systematic program of educating their students about sex (Strasburger, 2005).

More than half of the schools did not initiate any program to talk about sex education (Strasburger, 2005). Six out of ten schools did not seek the presence of the parents to be part of a preliminary program of sex education (Strasburger, 2005). But there were schools that did teach about sex education (Strasburger, 2005). Of the schools that did educate their students about sex education, one out of three schools taught that abstinence only was the proper response to the issue of teenage sex (Strasburger, 2005). Four of the ten schools taught the importance of abstinence and the relevance of birth control measures to accompany the practice of abstinence (Strasburger, 2005).

Only two out of ten schools do practice and teach a holistic program with regards to teenage sex issues (Strasburger, 2005). It is in this regard that the media seems to dominate the area of influence of teaching teenagers about sex and the issues consonant with them (Strasburger, 2005). The media has the ability to mold the disposition of the audience to the society's norms of behavior and the reality of the social aspects (Strasburger, 2005). It <https://assignbuster.com/sex-and-the-media-art-copying-life-or-vice-versa/>

also lends itself to the formation of what the culture views as acceptable (Strasburger, 2005). In a way, media is said to ingrain the view of the audience in what is really happening in their society (Strasburger, 2005).

In this context, the media inculcates the beliefs of the audience in what should be the view of the “ real” society (Strasburger, 2005). Another method that media affects us is the Social Cognition Theory (Strasburger, 2005). In essence, we pick up things around us; behavior, demeanor, and manners (Strasburger, 2005). One contributor to this directly is the society that they move around in; the other source is the media that surrounds them with messages, be it about sex or other issues (Strasburger, 2005). In the end, it is not the media or the prevalence of the sex content in the media that is wrong. It is stated that one person or entity can have such a profound effect in the molding of the values on the youth (Elias, 2004).

Rather, it is the failure of the prime and basic foundational units of society in the abrogation of their roles. This has allowed the media to take over the roles that they have designated to do. The parents and the schools must take back that role; if not teenagers will just consult with the television and the Internet on how to run their lives.