

# Adolescent sexuality in the media assignment



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Adolescent Sexuality in the Media Adolescent sexuality refers to sexual feelings behaviors and the development in adolescents. Adolescents tread a narrow path between childhood and adulthood. Most are not treated like children, but they are not afforded the full status of adulthood either. They face an identity crisis in which they must figure out who they are and what they want to become. They also face difficult decisions pertaining to their sexuality and with people of the same sex and opposite sex.

Teen pregnancy and parenthood are major concerns for many of our adolescents. Most teens have a belief that the media encourages and pressures them to have sex. The sexual content that is in the media today can have an enormous effect on any age group. Adolescents may be more susceptible than others. They may be exposed to sexual content in the media during a developmental period when gender roles, sexual attitudes, and sexual behaviors are being shaped. Adolescents are usually at risk due to their cognitive skills which allows them to critically analyze messages from the media and make their decisions based on future outcomes. At this point of time in their lives their decisions are not fully developed. Television and other media represent one of the most important and under recognized influences on children and adolescent's health and their behavior. This impact should be raising serious concern for not just parents and educators, but for physicians, public health advocates, and politicians as well.

Research has demonstrated that young people are heavy consumers of sexually-oriented media including TV, broadcast and cable channels, videos, movies, magazines, and, more recently, the internet (Brown et al. 1996).

Content analyses have also demonstrated that broadcast television contains

a high, growing and increasingly explicit dose of sexual messages, and that a low proportion of such messages display or model either restraint or contraceptive use (Kunkel, et al. 1997; Greenberg et al. 1997).

However, scientific evidence has not yet established a causal relationship between exposure to sexual content in the media and young people's attitudes concerning sexuality and their own sexual behaviors. Other analyses of broadcast media content indicate that, on average, teenaged viewers see 143 incidents of sexual behavior on network television at prime time each week, 4 with portrayals of three to four times as many sexual activities occurring between unmarried partners as between spouses. 5 As much as 80% of all movies shown on network or cable television stations have sexual content. 2 An analysis of music videos indicates that 60% portray sexual feelings and impulses, and substantial minority display provocative clothing and sexually suggestive body movements. 6 Analyses of media content also show that sexual messages on television are almost universally presented in a positive light, with little discussion of the potential risks of unprotected sexual intercourse and few portrayals of adverse consequences. , 8 Survey data show that adolescents' access to and use of media as sources of information are substantial. In a national study, 4 high school students reported an average of 2. 9 television sets, and 1. 3 of 10 (13%) of American children reported living in homes with two or more televisions, 97% had videocassette recorders in their homes, 75% had access to cable television, and more than half had a television set in their own rooms. Further, more than 80% of adolescents report that their peers find out some or a lot about sex, drugs, and violence from television shows, movies, and

other entertainment media. 9 About 10% of teens acknowledge that they have learned more about the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) from these media sources than from parents, school personnel, clergy, or friends. 9. Data like this is alarming, however, but is the media as a whole actually responsible for episodes of, child aggression, teen homicides, and increased rates of teenage drug use and sexual activity?

A 1997 pilot study found that young teenagers who are exposed to more soap operas and talk shows tended to have beliefs consistent with what they're viewing (eg, " married people often cheat on their husband or wife," " most of my friends have had sex with someone") (unpublished manuscript, Furno-Lamude, 1997). In a study of 75 adolescent girls, half pregnant and half not pregnant, the pregnant girls watched more soap operas before becoming pregnant and were less likely to think that their favorite soap characters would use birth control.

Society is definitely losing our adolescents to the prevalence of sexual talk, explicit lyrics and portrayals of sexual behavior in televised media. A 2001 report found that teens rank the media second to school sex education programs as a leading source of information about sex. Each year, teenagers view nearly 15, 000 sexual references, innuendoes, and jokes, of which, 170 will deal with abstinence, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, or pregnancy. The so-called family hour of prime time television from 8pm to 9 pm contains more than sexual incidents per hour, more than four times as much as in 1976.

Nearly one-third of the family hour shows contain sexual references, and the incidence of explicit language is increasing dramatically as well. The internet offers a wide variety of access to hard-core pornography with just a few keystrokes on the computer, cell phone or etc. In addition, the United States continues to have the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the Western world, despite the fact that American teenagers are not having sexual intercourse in greater numbers than their Western peers.

This is an important finding that points to the absence of a societal expectation that even with early sexual initiation, birth control is a necessity. Teenage pregnancy is a major problem in the United States today. Over one million teenage girls become pregnant each year resulting in a number of social and economic problems for which society often pays the price. Almost 20% of females will become pregnant before the age of 20 and approximately half of these will result in live births (Zabin & Haywood, 1993).

These children of adolescent parents are often disadvantaged in many areas. They are at greater risk of being born premature, possibly because of improper nutrition and prenatal care. Their mothers are often educationally and economically disadvantaged and there is a greater likelihood of being raised in an unstable or single parent household (Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1990). Public interest in helping adolescents to avoid these possible pitfalls accounts for many of the recent programs targeting the modification of adolescent sexual behavior.

Recent data suggest that the media represent an important and effective source of sexual information for teenagers. The high United States

pregnancy rate could be resulting from several interrelated factors: a lack of easy access to birth control, a lack of information about birth control in sex education classes, a glut of inappropriate sexual messages in the media, and an absence of appropriate messages in the media about abstinence and the use of birth control. Furthermore, Adolescent Sexuality is an important aspect of development during teen's adolescent years.

The ability to identify and communicate with an adolescent who may be at high risk of premature activity is important, since sexual intercourse at an early age can have serious short and long-term consequences. All parents should be prepared for discussions about sexuality and dealing with their adolescent. Having conversations with their adolescent on sexuality may be difficult for them, but will prove to be effective. Many adolescents claim they are both experienced and confident about sexual issues, yet they are often uncomfortable about discussing it with adults or their peers.

Pressure from peers may leave them wondering whether they are normal, or not. It is crucial that the family create more opportunities for conversations about sexuality with their adolescents. References 1. Committee on Communications, American Academy of Pediatrics. Sexuality, contraception and the media. *Pediatrics* 1995; 95: 298-300. 2. Kunkel D, Cope KM, Maynard-Farinola WJ, et al. *Sex on TV: content and context*. Menlo Park (CA): Kaiser Family Foundation; 1999. 3. Roberts DF, Foehr UG, Rideout VJ, et al. *Kids & media @ the new millennium*. Menlo Park (CA): Kaiser Family Foundation; 1999. . Louis Harris & Associates, Inc. *Sexual material on American network television during the 1987-88 seasons*. New York (NY): Planned Parenthood Federation of America; 1988. 5. Greenberg BS, Stanley <https://assignbuster.com/adolescent-sexuality-in-the-media-assignment/>

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