



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

TEEN SENSUALITY IN POPULAR MEDIA

Lohit S R¹

Research Scholar

Department of English

Mangalore University, Mangalagangothri,

Mangalore – 574199

Abstract: The presence of violence and sex in popular media represents a major health problem in young teenagers. Less is known about the effects on children and teenagers of sex in media. But it is possible to note that if violence can lead to real-life violence, surely media sex could lead to real-life sex. Today many of the teenagers can click a mouse/mobile before they can even tie their shoelaces. The impact of internet technology and television has captured the thoughts and imagination of young minds that are shedding their innocence too early. In my paper I will try to evaluate the effect of sex in popular media on children's behavior, while also demonstrating the link between media violence and sexual attitude in teenagers. (I have considered adolescents less than 18 years as teens.) The way in which children learn, makes the portrayal of violence, sex, drugs and alcohol within the media an important contributor to the behavior of children. It teaches positive or negative messages to children about conflict resolution, gender roles, courtship patterns and sexual gratification. The incredible amount of sexually suggestive material in popular media shows the teens to be functioning as a sort of "super-peer"², making early sexual activity seem like normal behavior for some impressionable young adolescents.

Keywords: Media sex, Real-life sex, Gender Roles, Courtship, Sexual Gratification, Super-Peer.

¹ Mr. Lohit S R, Research Scholar, Department of English, Mangalore University, Mangalagangothri, Mangalore – 574199.
Mobile No.: 9108553066
e-mail: tprs.lohit@gmail.com

² Dr. Bennett, David and Dr. Leanne Rowe (2004), "What to do when your children turn into Teenagers", Unistar Books, Australia, page-59.

Sex is Everywhere!!!

Teens are growing up surrounded by sexual images and messages. Sexuality is increasingly reaching younger and younger children. Kids and teens are exposed to sexual imagery in advertisements, on TV, in movies, in books, in music videos, reality shows, media ads, in video games, online porn on internet etc., many of these images are played for 'shock-value'³ (mainly to amuse than to inform), so they often contain graphic or violent sex. When children and teens see a lot of these images in the media, such behavior seems more normal to them. There is a strong association between perceptions of media messages and observed behavior, especially with children, who view of sex long before they have experienced it; and this links between seeing lots of sex in the media and earlier onset of sexual activity. In India media influences children, where -

- 72% of teens think watching TV with a lot of sexual content influences their peers' behavior somewhat or a lot.
- Programs with sexual content average 4 scenes per hour.
- On average, online videos contain 93 sexual situations per hour, including 11 hard-core scenes depicting behavior like intercourse and oral sex.
- Between 2001 and 2009, the number of sexual scenes on TV nearly doubled.
- 1 in 5 children will be approached by a sexual predator online.
- 15 to 24 year olds account for nearly half of all STD diagnoses each year in our country.
- Watching a lot of sexual content on TV and listening to sexually explicit music lyrics increase the chances that a teen will have sex at an earlier age.
- 60% of female video game characters are presented in a sexualized fashion.
- The biggest users of online pornography are between 12 and 17 year olds.

It's true that the more sexual content kids watch and listen to, the earlier they're likely to have sex themselves. Teens report that – "...their main source of information about sex, dating and sexual health comes from what they see and hear in the media"⁴. Sexual humor is a mainstay of adolescent entertainment. Thus, teen world makes dressing sexy, talking about sex and casual hook-ups seem like the norm.

The media representations influence teenage eating, smoking and drinking habits, adolescents are almost certainly affected-negatively-by sexual references and images from television, in movies and video games, in music, in magazines and on web sites.

The children in our society are being sexualized by the media; in their language, clothing styles and actions, even young children are aping their TV and music idols. TV soaps in popular channels like "Balika Vadhu", fashioned "Teen Diva", "Korean Dramas", child reality shows like "Boogy-woogy" and "Reality Shows"

³ "Sex in Media" (2010), <http://commonsencemediaeditors.com/sex> and media tips

⁴ This information is based on the American Academy of Pediatrics' policy statement; "*Sexuality, Contraception and the Media*", January 2001.

etc.; contributes to early sexualization of children. These contemporary popular programs portray socialization of child behavior susceptible to media exploitation.

Sexual behavior in Teens:

Teen sexuality is an important and, sad to say, much neglected subject. From infancy to pre-adolescence, and to the end of puberty children display a wide range of sexual behaviors. As the child moves through different stages of development, he or she will engage in different forms of exploratory play. Some of this play may be of a sexual nature. It is important to understand sexual growth in children, to understand a child's sexual behavior.

The toddlers and kindergarteners are openly interested and curious about their own and others' bodies. Young school-aged children often are full of curiosity and questions, yet have an increased desire for privacy. Pre-adolescent children (ages 9-12) demonstrate a heightened awareness of sexuality as they prepare for adolescence and puberty.

Unusual sexual behavior in a child is combined with sudden shifts in attitudes about school, peers, or activities may indicate a problem. Possible signs or indications of problem in child sexual behavior might include:

- A wide discrepancy in the age of the children involved in sex.
- An indication that a child was forced, threatened or intimidated into becoming involved in the sexual behavior, or that one child performed the behavior over the objection of another child.
- An indication that the child was tricked, lied to, or fooled into becoming involved in sexual behavior.

As children grow up, the number of people with whom they come into contact increases. Increased contacts may increase children's exposure to other children's sexual behaviors, and/ or to sexual activity. It is important to recognize the area of children's sexual development and the assessment of sexually aggressive children, and "sexualized"⁵ children, that is, teens who act out sexually. Because children are experiencing something profoundly new and unexpected (even if it is actually radically old and predictable), they lack the experiential vocabulary required to communicate it.

As any psychological process, the sexual development in children has the standard deviation: some children's sexuality develops more rapidly, while others' more slowly. For instance, children and adolescents often-times play "doctor" or "husband and wife". As long as they are of comparable age and development, each displaying the same curiosities and insecurities, such exploration is acceptable, even desirable. Also, the vast majority of children, from a young age, derive enjoyment from genital manipulation. While you can hardly call such activity "masturbation"⁶.

⁵ Dr. Gil, Eliana (2005), "Child Sexuality", Fairfax Press, Virginia, page-53.

⁶ Seifert, Kathy (2012), "Stop the Cycle Tweet", <http://www.childhood.com/adolescence>

Sexually problematic behavior in children and adolescents is a tell-tale sign of improper or unbalanced development, which has the potential to grow in to much bigger sexual problems as well as aggression, bullying, and violent tendencies. Learning to distinguish between "normal" and "alarming" childhood sexual behavior is key to ensuring healthy sexual development. If deviant or violent sexual behavior goes unnoticed or untreated in these early stages, there can be grave consequences.

Sex Education:

Sexual education is a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs, and values about such important topics as identity, relationships, and intimacy. Parents and psychologists/sociologists often wonder when sex education should be introduced, or who is responsible for educating children on sexuality. Young children/teens are able to understand more complex issues about health, disease, and sexuality.

As infants and toddlers, children begin to learn about their sexuality at this age. It is important at this stage to name all the parts the body. The Preschool children are very curious about bodies – their own and other people. They are trying on roles and behaviors and may be mimicking adults as they play doctor, marriage or catch and kiss. This combination of natural curiosity and role-playing sometimes leads to childhood sex play. As for preteens at this age they are going through all the changes of puberty. They are often concerned about their bodies, their looks, and what is “normal”. There is a lot of social pressure at this age and due to this child need guidance on making good decisions about relationships, communicating sexual limits, and protecting themselves from unsafe situations. Teenagers are often very curious about sex. At this stage, it is important that they have been told basic and accurate information, including what sexual intercourse is, homosexuality, the negative consequences of sex and information about protection.

Therefore, most schools have introduced basic sex education programs, designed purely as a supplement to the information children receive from parents and caregivers. But most children don't have proper means of understanding about sex because it is considered a taboo to discuss about sex with anyone. So most Indian children are fearful and ashamed of their sexuality.

Child Sexual Abuse:

Child sexual abuse or child molestation is a form in which an adult or older adolescent uses a child for sexual stimulation. It includes asking or pressuring a child to engage in sexual activities (regardless of the outcome), indecent exposure (of the genitals, female nipples, etc.) to a child with intent to gratify their own sexual desires, or to intimidate or groom the child, physical sexual contact with a child, or using a child to produce child pornography.

Child sexual abuse can occur in a home, school or work (in places where child labor is common). In India 'Child marriage' is one of the main forms of child sexual abuse; UNICEF has stated that: "it [child marriage] represents perhaps the most prevalent form of sexual abuse and exploitation of girls"⁷. The effects of child sexual abuse can include "...depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, propensity to further victimization in adulthood, and physical injury to the child, the risk of contacting sexually transmitted disease (STD) OR AIDS are among other problems"⁸. Sexual abuse by a family member is a form of incest, and can result in more serious and long-term psychological trauma, especially in the case of parental incest.

Child sexual abuse is outlawed nearly everywhere in the world, generally with severe criminal penalties, including in some jurisdictions, life imprisonment or capital punishment. In India the age of consensual sex is 18 years and in 2012 the Indian Parliament passed POSCO (the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act). The Act recognizes forms of penetration other than 'peno-vaginal penetration'⁹ and criminalizes acts of immodesty against children too. The Act criminalizes even watching or collection of pornographic content involving children. An adult's sexual intercourse with a child below the legal age of consent is defined as statutory rape, based on the principle that a child is not capable of consent and that any apparent consent by a child is not considered to be legal consent.

In many ways the media can be held responsible for child sexual abuse. Kids get more sex education from TV, music videos, and the internet's XXX-rated websites—than they do from their parents and teachers. They have outgrown themselves and the number of Juvenile offenders is on the rise. We can see every page of our newspapers carry one or the other reports of rape, child sexual abuse and molestation.

Pornography:

Pornography is a new trend of teenage addiction owing to internet and online chat rooms. With a total market of 50 billion dollars the sex industry is the fastest growing sector after Information Technology. Teens may hide Playboy/Debonair under their beds; even so, magazine is one thing; hardcore, deviant, or fetishistic websites are another. As with the development of sexuality some physical exploration can be expected. An occasionally naked 3-year-old is one thing; and a perpetually naked 12-year-old is another. Teenagers have no trouble getting access to graphic sexual presentations and are accessing media in environments isolated from the supervision or guidance of parents or other adults. The music videos aimed at teenagers are rife with sexuality or eroticism, much of it explicit. Pornography is a major reason of juvenile offenders linked to rape and molestation; and as also becoming "peeping-toms".

⁷ UNICEF, "Minutes on Protection of Female Child" (2008), India - a forecast.

⁸ Poonia Meenakshi (2009), "Media Research", Vishvabharati Publications, Delhi.

⁹ Chapter-II, Clause-5, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act-2012.

Pedophilia and Literature:

Pedophilia is a psychological culmination of having sexual desire or attraction towards young girls, especially pre-pubescent children. In English literature as well as other world literature we can see explicit contents of erotic child narratives and psychological readings.

The creator of 'Alice', Lewis Carroll in 1863 wanted to marry 11-year old Alice Liddell (a neighborhood girl who he loved). His attachment to the nude female child form was free of any eroticism; but he was obsessed to photograph nude or semi-nude girls¹⁰.

Peter Coviello in his essay "Poe in Love: Pedophilia, Morbidity, and the Logic of Slavery¹¹", 2003; observed Edgar Allan Poe's monstrous re-animate women as projections of an acute anxiety about the uncertain aliveness of the slave, a racialized corporeal turbulence in the bodies of women means, in turn, that only 'little girls' (not yet burdened with the depredations of adult femininity) appear to him as suitably unthreatening objects for intimate sexual investment.

In 1955, French novelist, Vladimir Nabokov wrote Lolita; it speaks of erotic motifs of Humbert Humbert (the protagonist) with 12-year-old Dolores Haze (nick named Lolita) and their sexual encounter. This novel gave rise to the term "Lolita Complex", a psychological expression dealing with sexual attraction towards 'nymphets'¹²/ young girls.

Violence and Sex:

Popular Media and internet continue to be one of the most powerful and important influences on the health and behavior of children throughout the world. Therefore, the amount of viewing and content of the programs is likely to have an impact on the behavior of children. Indirectly, children are exposed to violence daily. Modern technology brings on-the-scene coverage of gun battles, sniper attacks, riots, and other physical violence directly into homes where children may be watching. This violence may include scenes from elsewhere in the world, but also may depict national and local violent acts. Movies and television entertain with realistic and bloody dramatizations of murders, beatings and tortures. Warlike video games have become a popular part of culture, and children routinely watch cartoons that depict violent events. Thus, the association between media and violence builds aggressive tendencies in children.

The men and women are stereotyped throughout the media. Women are commonly viewed as attractive, young and married, and are frequently depicted in the context of home, family and romance. Men are portrayed as older, powerful, and employed outside of the home. Female adolescents are portrayed as being obsessed with their appearance. Intellectuals are frequently viewed as social misfits. As it relates specifically to

¹⁰ Bakewell, Michael (1996), "Lewis Carroll: A Biography", OUP.

¹¹ Coviello, Peter (Vol-70, No.-3, 2003), "Poe in Love: Pedophilia, Morbidity, and the Logic of Slavery", the Johns Hopkins Press, page-875.

¹² Meaning - Nubile girls.

young children, cartoons often use non-white characters as villains, further solidifying the stereotype of blacks as dangerous human beings. Thus, it is interpreted that teens who are more online are expected to be more sexually motivated.

Conclusion:

One of the most unfortunate aspects of gender inequities is the double standard related to sexuality. Comedian Billy Crystal puts it: “Women need a reason to have sex; while Men, they just need a place”¹³. In the game of love, girls get the worst deal by far. There is great deal of sex in the media showing or implying acts such as pre-marital and extra-marital sex. Children and teens exposed to such sexual content in social media become addicted to a powerful source of personal influence.



¹³ Dr. Bennett, David and Dr. Leanne Rowe (2004), “What to do when your children turn into Teenagers”, Unistar Books, Australia, page-98.